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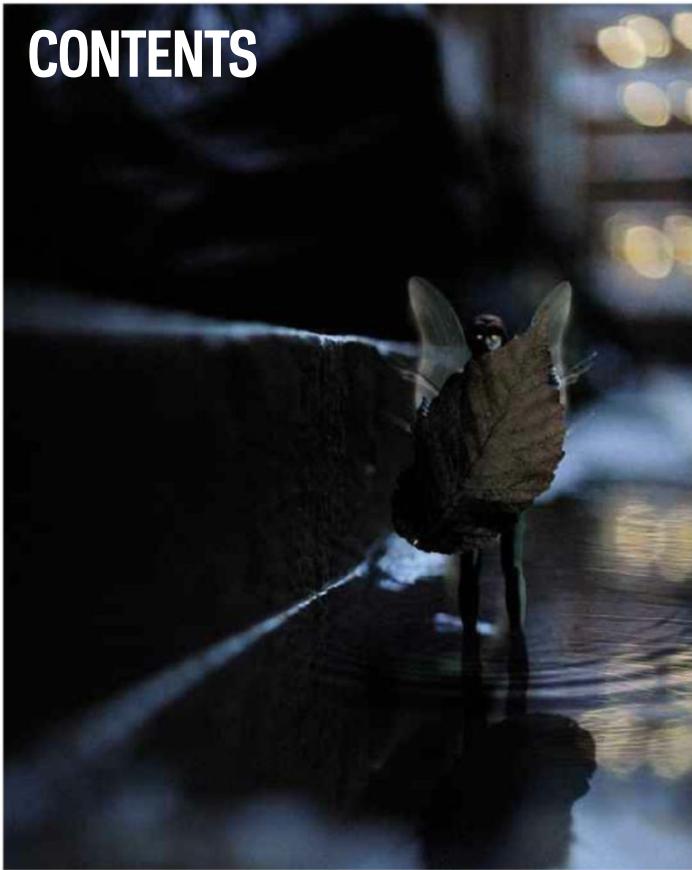
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**WARNING:** The Circus of Horrors contains some nudity and language of an adult nature, it is not suitable for children, sissies or chavs. This show contains nuts!

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COVER IMAGE: ETIENNE GILFILLAN FAIRY RENDERS: ALEX TOMLINSON  
MODEL: FRANCESCA PORCU ASSISTANT: PAOLO NAVARINO



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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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## STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Space oddities, Protestant ghosts, termite tales, naked kidnappers and more...

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ALL HEADER ICONS THROUGHOUT THE MAGAZINE BY CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0OD.

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**PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,**  
31-32 ALFRED PLACE, LONDON, WC1E 7DP

**PUBLISHER**  
DHARMESH MISTRY  
[dharmesh\\_mistry@dennis.co.uk](mailto:dharmesh_mistry@dennis.co.uk)  
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**PRINTED** BY WILLIAM GIBBONS & SONS LTD

#### DISTRIBUTION

Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide by Seymour Distribution Ltd.  
2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT  
Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001  
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**Speciality store distribution** by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

#### STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

For **Fortean Times** (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 31-32 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7DP, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$89.99. Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldwide Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434. Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 500, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

12 issues: UK £48; Europe £58; Rest of world £68  
US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

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 Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.  
ABC 13,904 (Jan-Dec 2016)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899  
© Fortean Times: DEC 2017

# EDITORIAL



## UFOS OVER THE PENTAGON

It's not often that UFO-related stories make headlines in the mainstream press these days; yes, the tabloids still rely on blurry cell phone pictures and dubious videos to fill space during the silly season, but (as Noel Rooney points out in his column on p5) conspiracy-based material seems to have been the fringe material *du jour* in 2017 as far as the mainstream media are concerned. As 2017 drew to a close, then, it was quite a surprise to see the *New York Times* (of all publications) running a story that revealed the existence of a shadowy secret programme funded (to the tune of \$22 million) by the US Defense Department to examine claims of unknown technology, military UFO encounters and even physical effects on people who had come into contact with materials associated with unidentified aerospace technology ("Glowing Auras and 'Black Money': The Pentagon's Mysterious UFO Program", *New York Times*, 16 Dec; see also "The Pentagon's Secret Search for UFOs", *politico.com*, 16 Dec 2017).

Apparently launched in 2007 with the backing of Democrat Senator Harry Reid, the programme channelled much of the cash into the aerospace research company run by Bob Bigelow, founder of the National Institute for Discovery Science (NIDS). While the Pentagon has never acknowledged the existence of the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification programme and apparently withdrew its funding in 2012, word is that the programme continues its ongoing investigations of military encounters with unidentified craft, collaborating with officials from the US Navy and the CIA. Much information, it seems, remains classified for the time being.

It wouldn't be the first time that the US military has mounted a long-running investigation into UFOs; but as Jenny Randles points out (see p28) in her look at where ufology stood in 1957 and where it is now, we've become used to such official programmes being shut down since the high-water mark of Project Blue Book in the 1950s. There is a lot to chew on here, including some fascinating video footage released by the Pentagon of an encounter between Navy fighter



jets and an unknown object. We'll be bringing you a full look at this developing story next issue, along with the personal recollections of retired US Army colonel John Alexander (of *The Men Who Stare at Goats* fame) about working with Bob Bigelow as part of NIDS to investigate the high strangeness reported from Utah's infamous Skinwalker Ranch.

#### ERRATA

FT358:63: Nick Warren, sometime FT contributor and eagle-eyed *Ripperana* editor, spotted a ghastly error. "Your review of the 2016 Jack the Ripper book *The Man Who Would Be Jack* states that the police suspect was Charles Cutbush. He was actually Thomas Cutbush. Charles Cutbush was his uncle, a senior Scotland Yard officer who committed suicide."

FT359:28: Bill Robinson of Slough, Berkshire, found a classic howler in our obituary of Albert Stubblebine III, where we "stated that that he was 'instrumental in the invasion... of Granada'. I am not aware that the US has ever invaded this Spanish city. They did, however, invade Grenada, a small Caribbean nation, in 1983."

FT360:25: Donald Rooum emailed to point out a Mythconceptions mistake: "Attention Mat Coward. If your sources really say coal is born no more than three or four million years ago, you need some more sources. Welsh coal was laid down in the Permian, between 300 and 250 million years ago, as any fule kno."

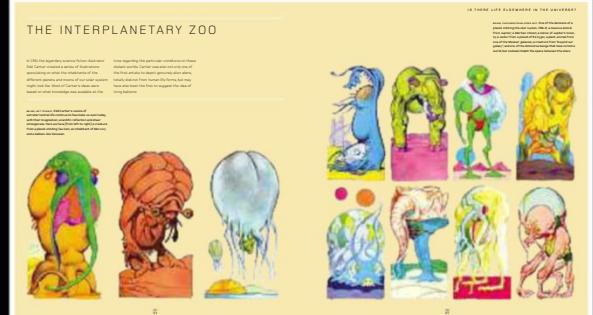
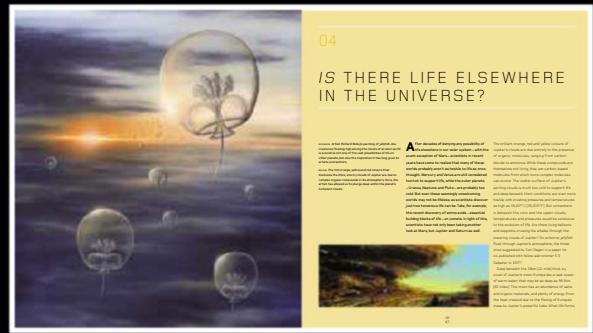
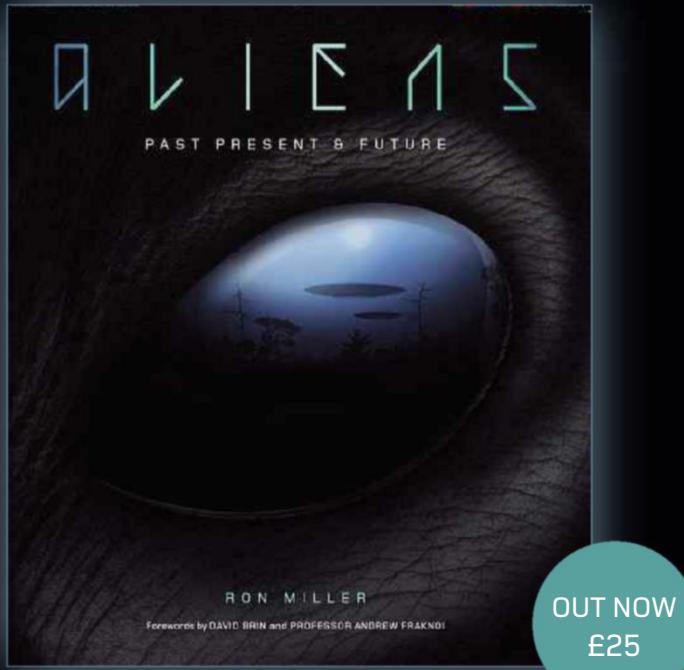
  
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## CONSUMED BY FIRE

Could the baffling death by fire of a London man be a case of spontaneous human combustion?

Shortly 1pm on Sunday, 17 September 2017, John Nolan, 70, was found on fire outside the William House flats in Orchard Place, not far from his flat in Tottenham, north London. Police, ambulance and fire crews were called and the blaze was quickly extinguished. Nolan was airlifted to a specialist burns unit in Colchester hospital, but died the next day when his life-support machine was switched off. His sister, Mary Caffery, 72, described him as being "completely unrecognisable" when she visited him in hospital due to the severity of his injuries. Relatives later said he suffered burns to his internal organs. Fire investigators determined no accelerant was found but were unable to identify the cause of the blaze. We wonder: could it possibly be a case of SHC (spontaneous human combustion)?

Nolan was originally from County Mayo in Ireland, but was living in Tenders Road, N17. He was a retired construction worker and was unmarried. His family believe he went out for his daily walk sometime after 11am on the morning of his death. His brother Jimmy, 68, who was the dead man's carer, told the *Hackney Gazette*: "I took the dog out for a walk and I came back. John was up and dressed. He had a clean pair of jeans on and a clean top on. He was having his Weetabix. At about 11am I went out to catch the train to Stoke Newington and I said 'I'll see you later on.' I came back at about two o'clock and the police were outside the door."

A post-mortem examination



ABOVE: John Nolan, who was found on fire in Tottenham, north London.

on 27 September gave the cause of death as severe burns. An inquest will open at Barnet Coroner's Court on 13 March 2018. The investigating officer, PC Damien Ait-Amery, said: "We have spoken with a number of witnesses who saw Mr Nolan ablaze, but we have yet to establish how the fire started. Mr Nolan was a well-liked member of the community and none of our enquiries so far have indicated that he had been involved in a dispute of any sort, nor does any account given by witnesses suggest that he had been in contact with another person at the time of the fire." *Hackney Gazette*, 25 Sept; *Huffington Post*, *Metro*, *Hampstead & Highgate Express*, 15 Dec; *D. Telegraph*, 16 Dec 2017.

• In September 2011, a coroner in West Galway, Ireland, declared that the death of Michael Faherty, 76, was a case of SHC, supposedly the first time a coroner had admitted to such a possibility [FT281:14-15]. Faherty had died on 22 December 2010; nine days later, there was another possible SHC in Ireland. A burnt stump of a leg was pretty much all that remained of Elisabeth McLaughlin, 50, in her Co. Donegal sitting room [FT283:9]. Readers unfamiliar with the arguments pro and con SHC should refer back to our reports in these two back issues.

A woman in her mid-40s was left fighting for her life after suddenly bursting into flames on a park bench in Flensburg,

north Germany, in November 2015. Witnesses said she didn't make a sound as the flames engulfed her [FT336:22]. In 2013 and 2015, two children of an Indian Dalit ('untouchable') kept bursting into flames [FT307:18, 324:4]; there was a similar case in China in 1990 [FT55:25]. In 2013, the thoroughly burned body of Danny Vanzandt, 65, was found in his undamaged kitchen in Oklahoma. There was no sign of any accelerant [FT300:5].

- A video posted on Liveleak shows a Dane being set on fire after a light-hearted tradition went pear-shaped. The unmarried man believed to be 25, can be seen engulfed in flames after friends threw cinnamon on him in the bizarre coming-of-age ritual. The tradition sees unmarried men (and women) in Denmark covered in spices when they reach the milestone age. It stems from the 16th century, where Danish spice salesmen were so caught up with work they "didn't have time to date". In the video, the unsuspecting man can be seen with a dust mask on and hands tied behind his back. He is splashed with water before the spices. Just seconds later he is engulfed in flames, before falling to the floor in agony. "Because he had a dust mask on and his friends poured water on him first, he was mostly unharmed; he only suffered from minor burns on his legs. Normally you just cover the victim in cinnamon, it's not part of the tradition to accidentally light your friend on fire," the poster on Liveleak said. It is thought the dust cloud around the victim ignited. *D. Mail*, 24 July 2017.



## OCTOPUS'S GARDEN

Everyday life in the city of the cephalopods

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## LUTHER'S GHOSTS

The Reformation and the modern supernatural

PAGE 18



## SLOW-MO SUPERNOVA

Mystery of the star that wouldn't die

PAGE 24

# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

With the mainstream media printing celebrity-inflected stories on fringe topics, NOEL ROONEY wonders who is really driving the conspiracy agenda these days...

### FLAT EARTH NEWS REPRISE

Recent (and frankly gleeful) reports in the media about the continuing growth of interest in Flat Earth theory have left me wondering if the Conspirasphere is still in control of its own destiny. The interest taken in conspiracy theories, and the whole panoply of alternative thinking (ancient mysteries, alternative health, parascience) has become such a staple of mainstream media that one could be forgiven for thinking that the spectators are driving the circus.

A classic example of this trend is a recent *Economist* blog exploring the statistical evidence of interest in Flat Earth theory. The chart displays a clear upward trend in online searches related to the subject; and there are peaks corresponding to public pronouncements by celebrities endorsing the theory. All well and good; then the blog proceeds to witter on about the implausibility of the theory, and juxtaposes this with hand-wringing (and flatly superficial) homilies about the threat posed by conspiratorial thinking to civilisation as we know it. This species of dire warning on the one hand, coupled with prurient 'look at the funny earthlings' fascination on the other, is a hallmark of media attitudes to the Conspirasphere; they provide us with cake and then tell us that cake is bad for us.

What the piece signalily fails to note is that the peaks in interest actually correspond to media focus on celebrities; that's to say, it's not the fact that a famous rapper thinks the Earth is flat that has drawn people to the subject, but rather the fact that the media are telling us that the rapper thinks so. As statistical analysis goes, this is both worthless and meretricious; snake-oil poured on waters troubled largely by the salesperson. Occasionally a celebrity is manufactured for the purpose (like 'Mad' Mike Hughes, the steampunk rocket non-scientist who didn't

quite launch himself into space to see for himself if the globe was actually a disc) but the basic principle is consistent.

Add a liberal dose of weighing-in by scientist celebrities such as the largely wonderful (but sometimes irritatingly pompous) Neil de Grasse Tyson – his photo-shopped Flat Earth lunar eclipse image was snidely comical, but didn't actually touch on the beliefs of the Flat-Earthers – and the cake is nicely iced. Responses from more serious scientific bodies (such as NASA) were conspicuously absent, perhaps indicating that at least some are aware that the Flat Earth thing is not really much of a thing.

There are people in the Conspirasphere who think that the whole farrago around (across?) the Flat Earth is in fact a conspiracy; a patently daft theory has been resurrected and promoted by Them to make conspiracy theorists and alternative thinkers look silly. The quantity (and largely abject quality) of media pieces on the subject makes this particular conspiracy theory look entirely plausible. Ultimately, however, it's the media that look silliest; the journalists who have written about Flat Earth theory far outnumber those few brave souls who attended the first Flat Earth Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, in early November. It's perhaps one of those rare instances where the strangest thing about the whole affair is that the lunatics are not running the asylum.

[www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/11/daily-chart-21](http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/11/daily-chart-21); [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/22/self-taught-rocket-scientist-plans-launch-to-test-flat-earth-theory](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/22/self-taught-rocket-scientist-plans-launch-to-test-flat-earth-theory); [www.breakingnews.ie/world/neil-degrasse-tyson-trolls-flat-earthers-with-one-brilliant-tweet-816094.html](http://www.breakingnews.ie/world/neil-degrasse-tyson-trolls-flat-earthers-with-one-brilliant-tweet-816094.html); [news.vice.com/story/people-from-around-the-globe-met-for-the-first-flat-earth-conference](http://news.vice.com/story/people-from-around-the-globe-met-for-the-first-flat-earth-conference); [www.henrymakow.com/2016/02/Flat-Earth-Psyop.html](http://www.henrymakow.com/2016/02/Flat-Earth-Psyop.html)

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### PICKPOCKET QUEEN'S ELDERLY VICTIM IN DESPERATE APPEAL TO FIND DEAD SON'S GLASS EYE

Birmingham Mail, 16 Mar 2017.

### Stoke-on-Trent councillor 'wanted elf to sit on knee'

BBC News, 12 April 2017.

### CYCLISTS STILL RIDING AFTER DEATH

Sunday Canberra Times, 9 April 2017.

### Manic emu gets cuffed

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 31 Jan 2017.

### DRAGONS RESCUED AFTER BEING LEFT AT ROADSIDE

St Albans & Harpenden Review, 6 April 2016.



# STRANGE DAYS

## SIDELINES...

### FISH FALL IN MEXICO

Civil defence officials in the state of Tamaulipas in northeast Mexico say a light rain on 26 September was accompanied by small fish that fell from the sky in the coastal city of Tampico. Photos posted online show four small fish in a bag and another on a sidewalk. Traditionally, the phenomenon is blamed on 'waterspouts'. [AP] 28 Sept 2017.

### FRINGE NOW MAINSTREAM

According to a survey by Chapman University in Orange, California, a majority (55%) of Americans now believe in Atlantis or another lost ancient super-civilisation, and 35% think space aliens visited ancient people in the past. These percentages have been growing year-on-year. Atlantis is now the single most popular fringe belief in the US, eclipsing astrology and ghosts for the first time. [jasoncolavita.com/blog](http://jasoncolavita.com/blog), 14 Oct 2017.

### I LIKE LIVING EAR

A doctor removed a live gecko from a man's ear after the tiny lizard crawled inside as he slept in Guangzhou, China. *D.Mirror*, 19 Aug 2017.

### ARMS AND THE MAN

A bus passenger was stopped when security staff found two severed arms in his luggage. The man said his brother had had them amputated after an accident and he was going to his village in southern China to bury them. *Metro*, 9 Aug 2017.



## FOODIE FADS

Tuck into a bizarre buffet of marmite, bananas, spaghetti hoops and trees...



ABOVE: Mehmod Butt enjoys a mouthful of his favourite food: trees.

● Mehmod Butt, 50, from Gujranwala district in India's Punjab province, has been surviving on fresh leaves and wood for the last quarter century. He started his unusual diet at the age of 25 as he had no work and could not afford a basic meal. "There was too much poverty in my family," he said. "Everything was beyond limit and it was very difficult for me to get a meal, so I thought it is better to eat wood rather than begging on a street. Eating wood and leaves has become my habit now." Years later, when he found work transporting goods on his donkey cart for 600 rupees a day and could afford conventional food, he found himself strangely keen on maintaining his weird eating habits. He said wood from banyan, tali and suck chain trees were his favourites. He is popular with local people, who are amazed that he stays healthy on his arboreal diet. "He has never visited a doctor or any hospital," said his neighbour Ghulam Mohammad. "He will stop his cart on the roadside anytime and will eat fresh tree branches." *Hindustan Times*, 22 April 2017.

*"I thought it is better to eat wood rather than beg on the street"*

● Shelly McClellan, 45, eats Marmite with every meal, having got addicted to the salty spread as a child. 'Mrs McMarmite', as she has been called, slaps the stuff on all her food, including spaghetti, tuna, sausages, cereals and soup. She keeps a Marmite pot in her handbag for holidays or when eating out. The carer, who lives with her husband and teenage son in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, has a collection of rare empty Marmite jars and drawers of Marmite-themed clothes. (Are the jars "rare" because everyone else throws them away?) Her kitchen has a Marmite shrine and her sitting room a 3ft (90cm) tall display (of Marmite, presumably). *Sun*, 1 May 2017.

● Dane Nash, 21, a student at Bristol Institute of Modern Music, starts each morning

with a smoothie made from 12 bananas, then eats another 10 bananas throughout the day. He buys five 40lb (18kg) crates of bananas every month, obtaining 80 per cent of his calories intake from the fruit. "Bananas are the way to go," he said. "They're the best tropical fruit readily available. They're cheap and they're consistent in terms of calories and nutrients... I'm now healthier than ever." Dane is 6ft 1in (185cm) and weighs 174lb (79kg). He turned vegan two years ago after suffering severe acne and now eats only fruit and uncooked vegetables, a diet that costs him around £160 a month. He is also a big spinach eater, devouring more than 2lb (0.9kg) a day. The rest of his diet also includes lettuce, berries, pears and oranges – supplemented with vitamins B12 and D. His typical dinner consists of a "huge" salad, including two heads of lettuce, two big bags of mixed leaves and a range of fruit, drizzled in an avocado dressing. A nutritionist warned that his diet lacked protein and fat. *D.Mirror*, *D.Express*, 5 Aug 2017.

● Mark O'Connor, 34, from Ratoath, Co Meath, Ireland, had spaghetti hoops for dinner every night for 30 years. He was born with spina bifida and needed an operation at the age of five to drain fluid from his brain. The traumatic hospital stay left him with a phobia of food and the only hot meal he would eat was the tinned pasta. However, a single visit to a hypnotist has now snapped him out of his hoop loop and he is discovering a whole new world of taste sensations. "I still have spaghetti hoops for old time's sake, but just a tin a week," he said. His mother spent years tempting him with home-made cooking without success. She sometimes managed to get him to eat a banana or yogurt, but the rest of his diet consisted of tea, toast, and cheese and onion crisps, along with his beloved hoops. *D.Express*, 3 June 2017.



# DANGEROUS CUPPA

Naked kidnap suspects had drunk 'trippy tea'

Royal Canadian Mounted Police called to the scene of a collision in an industrial park in Nisku, south of Edmonton, Alberta, at around 10am on 6 November found a BMW sedan that had collided with a pick-up truck. Inside the car were five people, all naked despite snow on the ground and the temperature about 10°C below zero (14°F).

A family relative explained that his daughters, aged 15 and 13, were having breakfast that morning with his ex-wife and two friends, a man and his wife. The man offered them some tea he had brought back from India, which sparked the "whole crazy spell", according to the relative. Two adults and a six-week-old baby were taken from a nearby residence and forced into the BMW about 20 minutes before the crash. The male victim - who had been stuffed into the trunk (or boot, as we call it in UK) - managed to escape from the moving car. Minutes later, so did the woman, holding the baby.

A passerby noticed the man on the side of the road and stopped to pick him up. The woman and baby followed shortly after. The good Samaritan was later identified as an employee of Leduc Plumbing and Heating by the company co-owner Derek Scott. "Apparently they came out of the ditch with no shoes on, so he stopped to see, obviously, if they needed help," Scott told CTV News. "It's the middle of the winter and people running around with no shoes on - you



*"The guy had to do the walk of shame in front of everybody..."*

stop to help them." After the three people climbed into the Samaritan's truck, Scott said, "the unclothed people in the BMW" drove up behind the truck and "rammed him from behind". The force of the collision pushed the truck into a ditch.

Shortly after they arrived on the scene, police and firefighters removed the five

suspects from the car, handcuffing them. "There was no covering," said Scott. "The guy had to do the walk of shame in front of everybody, then two more women did the walk of shame in front of everybody... then the one lady was the last to be removed - she put up the biggest fight... It was a pretty wild fight. It took five people to get her out."

No one was injured. The relative said all involved knew each other and the couple who had been forced from their home bore no grudges. Everyone belonged to the same Jehovah's Witness church. None of them could remember what had happened. "Whatever potency that stuff had obviously is making it so it's just a big blur," said the relative, adding that blood tests were taken at the hospital, but the 'tea' remained unidentified. (The Gang of Fort speculate that it was datura).

Three adults - a 35-year-old woman, a 30-year-old man and his 27-year-old wife - were charged with kidnapping and resisting arrest, while the teenage sisters were released without charge. Court records show that the 35-year-old woman was subsequently charged with impaired driving, dangerous driving, causing property damage over \$5,000 and four counts of assault with a weapon (a car). All three have been released from custody, but their identities cannot be revealed due to a publication ban. *National Post (Toronto), 9 Nov; Guardian, D.Mail, CBC News, 11 Nov; Edmonton Journal, 30 Nov 2017.*

## SIDELINES...

### FANCIFUL MAYOR

Melih Gokcek, the veteran mayor of Ankara, the Turkish capital, resigned on 23 October. Hosting a group of foreign journalists recently, he gave a gruesome Powerpoint demonstration about last summer's failed coup, and claimed that the Obama administration had created Daesh, and that American and Israeli seismic vessels were setting off earthquakes near Turkey's Aegean coast. *Economist, 28 Oct 2017.*

### SOCK TERRIFIES

RSPCA officers called to a house in Coventry on 8 September to rescue a lizard from under a bed discovered the reptile was actually a pink stripy sock. A "terrified" family thought a dangerous creature had entered their teenage daughter's bedroom. *D.Telgraph, Metro, Guardian, 15 Sept 2017.*

### HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

A new genus of large forest tree abundant from southern Peru to Ecuador, yet previously unknown to science, has been identified and described by researchers from the Smithsonian and Wake Forest University. Named *Incadendron esseri* and growing up to 100ft (30m) tall, the tree is a new genus commonly found along an ancient Inca path in Peru, the Trocha Unión. It belongs to the spurge family, Euphorbiaceae, best known for rubber trees, cassava, and poinsettias. *phys.org/news, 7 Sept 2017.*

### MEGAMIGRATION

The tsunami that struck north-east Japan on 11 March 2011 has carried 289 species of sea life 4,800 miles (7,725km) across the Pacific to beaches in Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii, and British Columbia. In the longest maritime migration ever recorded, around a million creatures - mostly crustaceans, sponges, sea slugs and sea worms - traversed the ocean on a flotilla of 600 pieces of debris (mostly plastic) between June 2012 and February 2017. Two thirds had never been seen on the US west coast before. *theguardian.com, 29 Sept; NY Times, 30 Sept; Metro, 5 Oct 2017.*



# STRANGE DAYS

## SIDELINES...

### FAR FROM HOME

A giant iguana more than 5ft (1.5m) long was spotted by a member of the public in a layby on the A72 near Broughton in the Scottish Borders on 12 September, and was being cared for in Lanarkshire by the Scottish SPCA, who named him Iggy. "Despite having a few bumps, he was alright once he had been warmed up," said an animal rescue officer. *BBC News, 15 Sept; D.Mirror, 16 Sept 2017.*

### WOLVES RETURN

Rome's symbol is a she-wolf sucking the infant brothers Romulus and Remus, and now wolves have been spotted outside the city for the first time in more than a century. Hidden cameras captured a pair of mature wolf cubs drinking from a water hole in the Castel di Guido nature reserve near Leonardo da Vinci airport. *D.Telegraph, 26 Sept 2017.*

### LONG TIME NO SEE

A 76-year-old German was re-united with his car 20 years after he forgot where he had parked. He reported his car missing to the police in Frankfurt in 1997. It was parked in a garage in an old industrial building, and was discovered because the building was due to be demolished. The police drove the owner to the car, but it was in a sorry state and could not be driven away. *irishtimes.com, 17 Nov 2017.*

### QUITE HARMLESS

A walker called police after spotting snakes lounging on a tarpaulin covering motor boats on the Thames in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, and, having searched for their markings online, believing them to be deadly. When the police arrived, they found the snakes were made of rubber. *D.Telegraph, 23 Aug 2017.*

### CARING EAGLES

Alex Keivers, a wildlife watcher on the Isle of Mull, was astonished to find a pair of white-tailed eagles incubating a ground nest of goose eggs. The eagles had been monitored for 15 years and had never been known to lay a single egg. Such fostering by eagles has never been observed before. *BBC Wildlife, July 2017.*

## OCEAN ODDITIES

Pink dolphins, a shark with frilly teeth, and life in octopus cities...



ABOVE: A frilled shark found by a Japanese fisherman in 2007.

### SHARK RARITY

An ultra-rare frilled shark was recently spotted and captured off the Algarve coast in south Portugal by a trawler during research on minimising unwanted fishing catches. It has a body shaped like an eel and a head like a snake – though it could be seen as phallic. Samuel Garman, who was one of the first scientists to study this shark back in 1883, believed its snakelike qualities inspired legends of sea serpents. The creature, measuring 145cm (4ft 9in), is considered a 'living fossil' as it belongs to a species that dates back 80 million years, coinciding with the peak of the dinosaurs. Humans have come across it just a handful of times, including off the coast of the southeastern US in August 2004. The one spotted in Portuguese waters was captured at a depth of 700m (2,300ft) below the surface. Previous encounters have been around this depth, though not below 1,000m (3,300ft).

The frilled shark's ocean habitat covers a wide area. It has been sighted off the coasts of Norway, Scotland and the Canary Islands; also in the Indian Ocean as well as waters off Japan, Australia and New Zealand. It was captured on film in Tokyo Bay in April 2017. Other than its habitat

and appearance, there is little known about it, since it had never been captured before. It gets its name because of the frilly way its 300 teeth are arranged. The teeth's 'frilliness', for lack of a better term, allows the shark to trap squid, fish and other sharks in its mouth when it lunges at them. *Fox News, 13 Nov; D.Mirror, huffingtonpost.co.uk, 14 Nov 2017.*

### DOLPHIN NEWS

- Uniquely, humpback dolphins along the Chinese coast have pink skin, but there are only about 60 of them left in waters around Hong Kong. The pink is from the blood vessels. The pinker they go, the more they are trying to cool down. *Sun, 15 July 2017.*



ABOVE LEFT: A pink humpback dolphin seen swimming off the Chinese coast.

- Humpback male dolphins appear to woo potential partners with gifts; they have been filmed presenting females with marine sponges. Researchers saw one diving down to dislodge a sponge fixed to the seafloor. He then balanced it on his beak and pushed it towards the female. But these gifts could also be used to intimidate females into mating – or so it seems: boisterous males have been seen to throw the large sponges at them. *Sun on Sunday, 26 Nov 2017.*

- A four-year-old beluga whale was moved to live with bottlenose dolphins in the Koktebel dolphinarium in Crimea in 2013, but initially struggled to communicate with her new tank mates. However, within a few months, she had begun to copy their whistles and clicks. It could be the first example of an animal changing its vocalisations in an attempt to 'talk' to another species. "Two months after the beluga's introduction into a new facility, we found that it began to imitate whistles of the dolphins, whereas one type of its own calls seemed to disappear," said Elena Panaova, a researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. "While the imitations of dolphin whistles were regularly detected among the beluga's vocalisations, we found only one case in which



## SIDELINES...

### AGENT OF CHAOS

A man who worked as a baggage handler at Singapore's Changi Airport swapped tags on hundreds of bags, sending the luggage to the wrong destinations. Tay Boon Keh, 63, was charged with 286 counts of 'mischief'. Changi is one of the world's biggest hubs and often voted the world's best airport. Tay is believed to have changed baggage tags almost every day from November until February. He did not explain his actions, but intended to plead guilty. [R] 21 Sept 2017.

### VANISHING SHEEP

Last September, shepherds in southern Norway reported several cases of mysterious sheep disappearances with a disturbing lack of any physical evidence, including intact fences, and no blood or wool littering pastures. Some local butchers reported finding fishhooks in the wool and flesh of sheep selected for butchering. Are drones armed with hooks and winches swooping in to pick up hapless sheep? [mysteriousuniverse.org](http://mysteriousuniverse.org), 7 Sept 2017.

### DODO VARIETY

The mystery of why sailors gave such varying descriptions of the dodo has been solved: the extinct bird constantly moulted, completely changing its appearance. The discovery was made by the splendidly named Cape Town palaeontologist Dr Delphine Angst after looking at the bone microstructure of 22 different dodos from Mauritius. D. Telegraph, 25 Aug 2017.



ABOVE: This octopus city – dubbed 'Octlantis' – has been constructed by cephalopod architects out of clams and other shells.

the dolphins produced short calls that resembled those of the beluga. This case may be an interesting example of interspecies communication."

Dolphins have signature whistles, like names, which they use to call to each other. After just a few months the beluga had stopped using its own calls and switched to dolphin signatures. The researchers have so far recorded more than 90 hours of audio, where the whale communicates like the dolphins. Beluga whales are highly intelligent and have been known to imitate people, other animals and other sounds they hear. The research conducted at the dolphinarium was published in the journal *Animal Cognition*. D. Telegraph, 4 Nov 2017.

- US Navy-trained dolphins are being used to help round up vaquita porpoises in the Gulf of California in a mission to save the world's rarest marine mammal from extinction. It is believed there are only 30 of the creatures, known as the "panda of the sea" because of their strange beauty, left in the wild. Numbers have plummeted due to illegal fishing methods, including banned gill nets, in their only habitat. The dolphins have been trained to seek out the vaquita and leap out of the water when they locate a

### *The gloomy octopus is not the loner we once thought it to be*

specimen, alerting a capture team that will move them to an ocean sanctuary off the coast of San Felipe, Mexico, while their natural habitat is made safe, including removing the gill nets, which have been banned. Sunday Telegraph, 16 Oct 2017.

- A dangerous shark was thought to be lurking off the shore of Cornwall after a dolphin carcass with a huge wound was washed up off Newquay on 18 January 2017 – the 27th dolphin found dead on the county's coast within a fortnight. Experts said the metre-long hole in the side was "potentially consistent with a shark bite". But it was unlikely the work of a great white, despite local speculation. Marine biologists were seeking to establish why six times more dolphins were stranded on Cornish beaches in January compared with the same period the previous year. Sharks were not always thought to be responsible – stormy weather, fishing nets and pollution were

also being blamed. Around 21 species of shark are found off Cornwall, including large predators such as thresher, blue, porbeagle and mako sharks. D. Mail, 19 Jan 2017.

### OCTOPUS CITY

Scientists have discovered that the "gloomy octopus" (*Octopus tetricus*) is not the loner we once thought it to be. In Jervis Bay, eastern Australia, the species has been seen to congregate, communicate and even evict one another at a site marine biologists call Octlantis. Sentinel octopuses ward off new entries by darkening in colour. Another nearby site in Jervis, found 50ft (15m) below the surface in 2009 and named Octopolis, was thought to be an anomaly, formed around a large human-made metal object. But the latest discovery proves Octopolis is not a one-off. Lacking any human object, its aquatic architects have constructed walls from clam and scallop shells. Godfrey-Smith, author of *Other Minds: the Octopus and the Evolution of Intelligent Life*, concludes that these are multi-generational places that offer unique opportunities to observe the behaviour of animals said to possess the intelligence of a three-year-old human. Guardian, 19 Sept; (Queensland) Courier Mail, 4 Oct 2017.

MARTIN ROSS





# STRANGE DAYS

## SIDELINES...

### FELINE SHAVER

Following the April report of pet cats in Waynesboro, Virginia, having their bellies and legs shaved [FT356:10], up to 10 ginger cats in Tonbridge, Kent, returned home with patches of fur shaved off. Beverly Findlay's two ginger cats had been targeted several times during the eight weeks up to early June. Her two other non-ginger cats were left unscathed. Last year, 12 cats were shaved in the Cotswolds. The attacker was never caught. *Sun, 5 June 2017.*

### STILL LOST

A woman who vanished 42 years ago after her husband dropped her off at a doctor's surgery has been found alive. Cold case detectives tracked down Flora Stevens, 78, to a care home near Boston. She now has dementia and cannot recall her 1975 disappearance in New York. Her husband died in 1985. *Metro, 30 Oct 2017.*

### NOTTINGHAM NOISES

A loud booming noise was heard across Nottingham on 27 May 2017, followed on 30 July by 20 minutes of a loud squeaking noise. News of this prompted a couple to complain they had faced months of sleepless nights due to a loud high-pitched noise across Calverton, seven miles (11km) from Nottingham, at 4.30am every morning. *Nottingham Post, 1+14 Aug 2017.*

### PSYCHIC PETS

According to a survey by pet charity Blue Cross, 29% of UK pet owners believe their pet has seen a ghost or sensed a supernatural presence. And 43% of them believe their pet tried to tell or warn them about its presence by growling, barking or hissing at an invisible entity. *South Wales Argus (Newport), 27 Oct 2017.*



## TERMITE TALES

Richard Dawkins hymns a termite cathedral, plus microbes rock out



ABOVE: This magnificent 'termite cathedral' snapped by Fiona Stewart bears a striking resemblance to Gaudi's Sagrada Família.

### TERMITE CATHEDRALS

With its towering spires and graceful columns, it's hard to believe that this structure, resembling Antonio Gaudi's Sagrada Família in Barcelona, was built by insects. The famous atheist, Professor Richard Dawkins, tweeted the image, commenting: "This magnificent cathedral, photographed by Fiona Stewart in Queensland, was built by termites. No architect (as Dan Dennett pointed out) no blueprint, not even in DNA. They just followed local rules of thumb, like cells in an embryo. Please, does anyone know the genus/species?"

Speaking on Radio 4's *Today* programme, Matt Shardlow, CEO of Peterborough-based Bugs Life, said: "What we think has happened here is something quite unusual. The colour of this termite mound is quite grey, which is very typical of the magnetic termite that lives in northern Australia, where this was photographed. They build their big mounds along a north-south line, aligned with the magnetic poles. It looks as if this particular colony has

been damaged at some point, and those tall spires are the termites' efforts to rebuild and get the height back within their colony as quickly as they can."

The mounds are built by two species of termite, 'magnetic termites', *Amitermes meridionalis*, and 'cathedral termites', *Nasutitermes triodiæ*. They are responsible for some of the tallest non-human structures, relative to their size, in the world. They build huge mounds up to 25ft (8m) high in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. Now a prominent feature of the arid landscape 'Down Under', the mounds house millions of termites.

The structures are made from a mixture of faeces, mud and wood, which forms a robust, waterproof clay-like substance. The termites live underground, which requires an oxygen supply, and the mounds work like an air conditioning system, funnelling air down to the colony below. This also feeds the farms of fungi that the creatures nurture for nutrients. *D.Mail (online), 23 Nov 2017.*

### PROG MICROBES

Three new species of microbe found in the guts of termites have been named after members of the Canadian prog-rock band Rush, owing to the microbes' long hair and rhythmic wriggling under the microscope. They are covered with flagella, long threads that cells use to move around. Many cells have a few flagella, but these little rockers have more than 10,000 very long ones; they also have rhythm. They bob their heads and sway their bodies in microscopic dances, prompting researchers at the University of British Columbia to baptise the new *Pseudotrichonympha* species *P. lee*, *P. lifesoni*, and *P. pearti* after musicians Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart. The microbe named after drummer and lyricist Peart contains a rotating intracellular structure never seen before. The researchers dubbed this the 'rotatosome', and even though they tested several theories, they still can't figure out what it does. The researchers outlined their findings in *Scientific Reports*. *Science Daily, 27 Nov 2017.*

# ETHICAL VITAMINS WITH AN ORGANIC HEART

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PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archæological discoveries

## ENTERING A TUNNEL

An archæological team from the 'Great Mayan Aquifer Project' has found a sealed portal within a ruined pyramid structure known as the Ossuary, situated within the Chichén Itzá complex in the Yucatán Peninsula. The sealed feature is thought to be the entrance to a tunnel. This has not been entered as yet, but the investigators think it was closed by the Mayans themselves around 1,000 years ago and will lead to beneath Chichén Itzá's centerpiece – the large Kukulkán Temple pyramid known as El Castillo.

Team leader Guillermo de Anda states they are looking for a Mesoamerican pattern showing a link between Mayan architecture and caves, tunnels and cenotes (sinkholes in the limestone geology of the Yucatan Peninsula that held mythical status with the ancient Mayans). He says the team will try to open the newly found portal "to see if the tunnel leads us to the entrance of the cenote beneath the Castle [El Castillo]." (But this sinkhole/cenote has so far been revealed only by geophysical imaging



techniques.) *Newsweek*, 14 Nov 2017.

The Mayans built extraordinary straight causeways known as *sacbes*, some many miles in length, which linked their ceremonial sites across the peninsula. What is not widely known is that they had beliefs

about invisible *sacbes* running in straight routes through the air, and also running underground. It could be that this myth has a real foundation if the 'Great Mayan Aquifer Project' is successful in identifying tunnel networks linking ceremonial structures.



## AT THE GATES OF HELL

In October 2017, David Kennedy from the University of Western Australia took aerial photographs of strange stone features in Saudi Arabia's Al-Ula lava fields region ("Harrat Khaybar"), known as 'The Gates of Hell'. Many of the features are rectangular (almost 400 of them found so far), some with multiple lines

of rocks running across them; because this forms a pattern reminiscent of a traditional farm gate, they have been termed 'gates' – the largest so far recorded measures 1,224x262ft (373x80m). Their outlines are formed by double rows of rocks or blocks with rubble infill. Other structures consist of circles, often containing a central rock

pile, an appearance that earns them the label of 'bullseyes'. Yet another configuration is a triangular form ('kites'), of which some 260 have been noted, and they sometimes point towards the 'bullseye' features. These main pattern types are accompanied, variously, by rows of rock piles and low stone walls. Because some of the

structures have been partially covered by lava flows, they clearly belong to remote antiquity. Some 'kites' (which Kennedy claims were animal traps) overlay some of the 'gates', meaning the latter are older – possibly 9,000 years old. There certainly is a lot to be untangled here. *LiveScience*, 12 Nov; *Newsweek*, 15 Nov 2017.



ABOVE: The cleaned and restored Pylos Combat Agate, and a drawing illustrating the incredibly detailed figures represented on the tiny Minoan sealstone.

## ART HISTORY OVERTURNED

An astonishing Minoan gem or sealstone, one of the finest works of Aegean Bronze Age art ever unearthed, is set to rewrite the history of art. In 2015, the tomb of a powerful warrior, dating from around 1450 BC, was discovered in an olive grove near the Palace of Nestor in the ancient city of Pylos, southwest Greece. The remarkably intact skeleton has been named the "Griffin Warrior" after an ivory plaque adorned with a griffin was found buried with him. The shaft grave also contained a carved gem encrusted in limestone. After a year of careful restoration, the scene beneath has been uncovered. It depicts an ancient battle in which a bare-chested warrior plunges a blade into the neck of an assailant,

while a corpse lies at his feet. The seal, named the Pylos Combat Agate, has been hailed as one of the finest proto-Greek artworks ever discovered and may depict the mythological war between the Trojans and Mycenaeans, related in Homer's *Iliad* centuries later.

"What is fascinating is that the representation of the human body is at a level of detail and musculature that one doesn't find again until the classical period of Greek art 1,000 years later," said Jack Davis, professor of archaeology at the University of Cincinnati's Department of Classics, which conducted the excavation. Even more remarkable is that the meticulously carved combat scene was painstakingly etched on a piece of hardstone measuring just 1.4in (3.6cm) in length. Indeed, many of the

seal's details, such as the ornamentation on the weaponry and jewellery, are too small to be seen with the naked eye. "Some of the details on this are only a half-millimetre big," said Prof Davis. "They're incomprehensibly small." Could the Minoan craftsmen have used magnifying lenses – or has human eyesight deteriorated?

It is believed that the gem was created in Crete due to a longstanding consensus that Mycenaean civilisations imported or stole riches from Minoan Crete. The fact that the stone was found in a Minoan tomb in mainland Greece is suggestive of cultural exchange between the Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations. The gem is thought to depict the warrior it was buried with, though it remains possible that

he was a priest.

The grave revealed more than 3,000 objects, including four solid gold signet rings bearing highly detailed Minoan iconography, silver cups, precious stone beads, fine-toothed ivory combs and an intricately built sword, among other weapons. Although the Minoans were culturally dominant to the Greek mainlanders, their civilisation fell to the Mycenaeans around 1500-1400 BC – roughly the period in which the Griffin Warrior died.

*Jack L Davis & Sharon R Stocker: 'The Lord of the Gold Rings: The Griffin Warrior of Pylos', Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2016, 85 (4); Science Daily, 7 Nov; D.Telegraph, 9 Nov 2017. PAUL SIEVEKING*

## LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT

We've remarked before that it seems incredibly careless of history to lose things as large as cities, but it happens a lot. Here are some recent finds.

Archaeologists from Turkey's Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, working with a team of divers, have found 3,000-year-old ruins stretching for about a kilometre under Lake Van. The structures are thought to belong to the Iron Age Urartian civilization. Even though submerged for many centuries, one of the ruins, that of a fortress, still has walls 10-13ft (3-4m) high. *The Independent*, 23 Nov 2017.

Also in Turkey, a small team of historians and economists have developed a cunning plan – a cunning algorithm, actually. They have analysed 12,000 clay tablets from the Bronze Age kingdom of Assyria (centred on the Tigris in Iraq and extending partially into Turkey, Syria and Iran). The cuneiform texts inscribed into the tablets relate mainly to shipment documents, accounting records, seals and contracts. City names involved in

the passage of goods are mentioned. Some of those cities, such as Kanesh in central Turkey, are known, but others are lost. By using mathematical calculations based on the volume of shipped goods between cities and the frequency of such shipments to certain ones, the team has been able to work out which cities were nearer or further from the known locations. In all, 26 cities were

involved, 15 known and 11 unknown, but now the locations of those 11 lost cities can be identified with high probability. *Washington Post*, 13 Nov 2017.

Finally, satellite imagery has revealed square-ish structures separated by narrow water channels clustered on a shore of the remote island of Pohnpei in the western Pacific (pictured below). Massive walls form the perimeters of each of these geometrical features, which have now been collectively classed as an archaeological site called Nan Madol. Initial speculation is that it was the capital of some ancient civilisation on Pohnpei, but there is much that still needs to be known. *D.Express*, 4 Nov 2017.





# TOTAL RECALL

Most of us struggle to recall what we did last week, but for some people a Proustian remembrance of things past is both a blessing and a curse

Three years ago, Rebecca Sharrock read in a newspaper that it was impossible for people to remember details of the first four years of their lives. "What absolute nonsense," she thought, since she could clearly remember her life all the way back to when she was just 12 days old. Her parents had carried her to the driver's seat of their car and laid her down for a photo. She remembers looking around and wondering what the seat cover and steering wheel above her were.

Sharrock, 17, from Brisbane, Australia, is just one of only 80 known people suffering from a mysterious condition called Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory (HSAM) - but what makes her special is how far back her memories go. Other HSAM sufferers only remember details of their daily lives from when they were 10 to 14, but Sharrock recalls specific moments of her infancy, such as the dress she wore on her first birthday and how itchy it felt, how scary the Minnie Mouse plush toy she got as a present looked and how she would always push it away. She remembered the birth of her younger sister Jessica shortly after her second birthday - and how she had to hand down her clothing and toys. "I didn't understand what a sister was back then and was far more interested in playing with my toy train," she said.

Sharrock's unusual case recently featured in a television documentary, where reporter Allison Langdon asked her questions about the Harry Potter books. "I tested her on the [Harry Potter] books because she says she can remember every single word from every single book," Langdon said. "So I would pick up a book and open a page and read her a line and immediately she would name the book, chapter number, chapter name and could recite every word until I told her to stop."

Being able to remember every little detail about most of your

REBECCA SHARROCK



*She could clearly remember her life all the way back to when she was just 12 days old*

life is a remarkable ability, but as every HSAMer will tell you, it can be very tough to deal with. Forgetting is one of the mechanisms we use to get over tragic or sad experiences, but it's something that HSAMers are incapable of doing. Even walking on the street and lightly bumping into somebody triggers distant memories from Sharrock's childhood, when a boy bumped into her and knocked her over. She's taken right back to that time, vividly reliving the experience all over again. She admits that having to emotionally relive painful

experiences of her life constantly is a heavy burden. Also, people with HSAM often do poorly in school, because they have problems filtering through all the information, remembering only the important bits. To them, it's information overload. "You would think you would blitz your tests, but it doesn't make you a genius," Langdon said. Sharrock writes about HSAM and autism at her website, [alifejournaltalks.com](http://alifejournaltalks.com). *D.Mail (online)*, 24 April; *Independent (online)*, 25 April; *oddycentral.com*, 2 May 2017.

• Alexandra Wolff, 25, from Maryland also has HSAM, which she says feels like "time travel". She can remember everything she has heard and felt in a day, "right down to getting sick to my stomach or getting a headache." This means she can relive the happiest moments in her life in minute detail, and does so often alone in her room. "It's a huge temptation," she said. "If I didn't have stuff to

LEFT: Rebecca Sharrock's memories go back to when she was just 12 days old.

do all day, I could probably live in the past 24/7." *Independent (online)*, 25 April 2017.

• Jill Price from southern California, who is now 52, can remember every single event in her life, in chronological order, from the time she was 12. In 2000, she contacted memory specialist Dr James McGaugh at the University of California-Irvine, asking for "help" with her condition. Every detail about every day since 1980 - what time she got up, who she met, what she did, even what she ate - is locked in her brain and can be released to come flooding back by common triggers like songs, smells or place names. Brain scans showed that parts of her brain - the regions also associated with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) - were three times the size of those in other women her age. "We made the mistake of calling [her condition] 'hyperthymesia' [from the Greek *thymesis*, remembering], which was a terrible idea, because when you name it in that way, it sounds as if you know what it is," said Dr McGaugh. *ABC News*, *D.Telegraph*, 9 May 2008; *Guardian*, 8 Feb 2017 (long article by Linda Rodriguez Robbie). For our initial report, see FT298:10.

• A US skier was left with superhuman mental abilities after banging her head during an accident on the slopes. Besides sustaining a broken collarbone and concussion, the unnamed woman could recall exact details about every place she had ever seen and could draw maps or diagrams of each location and building. The rare condition is known as acquired savant syndrome, a neurological trauma that leads to amazing musical, artistic, mathematical or recollection abilities. At the time, it was believed to affect just 50 people in the world. *D.Mirror*, 18 April 2015.



# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 220: NO LAUGHING MATTER

I have frequently read distressing reports on the increase in British attacks verbal and physical on disabled people. It's in a long miserable tradition, alas, retreating back through history, from the 'Elephant Man' to the gentry tormenting Bedlam inmates to the mocking of 'mad' Malvolio in Shakespeare until we reach antiquity. For which, see the exemplary account of Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Greco-Roman World* (1995), supplemented by Lisa Trentin, 'Deformity in the Roman Imperial Court,' *Greece & Rome* 58 (2011), 195-207, and Victoria Brignell's article in the *New Statesman* (7 April 2008).

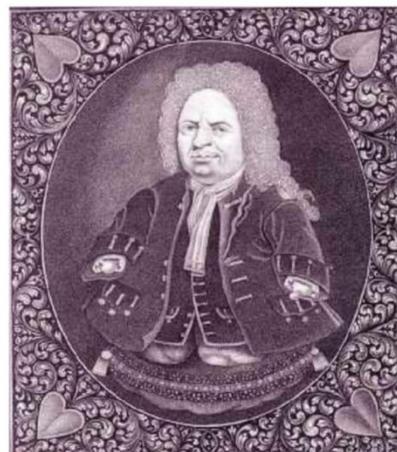
Many adult Roman skeletons have been found with spinal deformities and signs of osteoarthritis. Fewer afflicted babies would have survived than nowadays. Julius Obsequens's Book of *Prodigies* (culled from Livy) contains many cases of babies born with grotesque deformities, such as this one in chapter 40: "A boy was born with exposed intestines and at the back no opening; it gave a cry and died."

Striking that this obscure minor writer has produced what must be one of the most affecting sentences in classical literature, worthy to be juxtaposed with this mini-short story attributed to Ernest Hemingway: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn".

Greek nastiness is as old as Homer, whose *Iliad* (bk2 vv265-70) has Odysseus beat the squaddy Thersites on his hump as the onlookers jeered. Hunchbacks have always been (un)fair game – think Richard III and Quasimodo. Grotesque Roman pedigree here. One of Nero's entourage, Vatinius, is thus vilipended by Tacitus (*Annals*, bk15 ch34): "The foulest monstrosity of that court. Brought up in a shoemaker's shop, he was physically deformed and had the wit of a buffoon, taken as the butt of ridicule." Martial and Juvenal also mention Vatinian glassware as popular at Roman tables, shaped to resemble his odd long nose – or penis?

Commodus went the furthest, serving at a banquet two hunchbacks on a silver platter, smeared with mustard (*Augustan History*, ch11 para1). It's – mercifully – not clear if these unfortunates were dead to be eaten or alive for mockery.

This (for once) makes the pranks of teenaged emperor Elagabalus look relatively innocuous. Himself possessing a huge collection of deformed people,



his idea of fun (*HA*, ch29 para3) was to hold special banquets for octets of men respectively bald, one-eyed, or fat, where they were figures of fun.

Spectators at the Athenian theatre split their sides laughing at Aristophanes's gibes in his *Clouds* at the appearance of Socrates (reputedly the ugliest man in town), while down south in Sparta they were exposing any newborn babies suspected of malformation, and across the wine-dark sea Romulus, after his Boko Haram-style abduction of the Sabine women, had decreed the slaughter of all disabled infants under three.

Cicero (quoted by Quintilian, bk6 ch8) crystallised the attitude: "In deformity and bodily disfigurement, there is good material for making jokes". On this and the broader issues raised, cf. Mary Beard's superlative *Roman Laughter* (2014).

The name Cicero suggests 'chick-pea'. Other Roman cognomina hint at 'humorous' physical traits, e.g. Flaccus ('big-eared' – a trait shared with Dumbo, Mr Spock, and Baldwinius), Naso ('big-nose' – shades of Jimmy Durante), Strabo ('squint-eyed').

"The Greeks had a word for it." Apparently not for 'disabled', their term being teras, followed by Latin monstrum, both indicating something weirdly repulsive. Hence (e.g.) Juvenal (*Satires* 4. 115) dubs a sightless informer "a great and notorious monstrum".

Romans had a morbid Felliniesque passion for viewing human menageries. Quintilian (bk2 ch5 para11) says many paid more for deformed slaves than normal ones, whilst Plutarch (*Moralia*, para520C) mentions a popular 'monster

market'. To maintain a constant supply, Longinus (*On the Sublime*, ch44 para5) says slaves were (like battery hens) kept in cages to stunt their growth.

Ludwig Friedlaender (*Roman Life & Manners*, vol4 pp6-8, 1913) provides a depressingly long and meticulously documented list of freak shows, ancestor of the (I hope) discredited funfair exhibits of World's Hairiest Woman, Child With Two Heads, and suchlike, which I (guiltily) remember paying to see.

Augustus, himself abhorring physical deformities, gave granddaughter Julia a dwarf, Conopas, supposedly the tiniest man alive. It was rumoured, as is often the case, that she wanted him for sex: compare Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn*, "The midget interested him because she had a perfectly normal cunt."

One happier-ending anecdote (Pliny, *Natural History*, bk34 ch3 paras11-12). A wealthy woman, Gegania, bought an expensive silver chandelier. The auctioneer – don't see this happening at Sotheby's – threw in a "hideous hunchback" called Clessipus, whom she would parade naked for her guests to mock. But she "conceived an abominable passion for him," he became her lover and heir, and ended up with her vast fortune.

Moving forward in time, two more pleasant stories. Matthew Buckinger (1674-1740, pictured above) had no arms or legs (Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1796), but could draw with remarkable neatness, was famed for calligraphy, and married "a tall handsome woman". Other sources credit him with playing a dozen musical instruments, dexterous juggling, expert pistol marksmanship, while finding time to acquire four wives and father 11 children.

Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh (1831-1889) had only rudimentary arms and legs, but was variously credited with equestrian skill, fishing and shooting, artworks, seducing countless girls plus sojourn in an Eastern harem, a seven-child marriage, high public offices, and finally election as MP – being placed in his seat by a manservant. Whether a proof of charming innocence or puckish humour, Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Curtsey: The End of the Debutantes* (2007, p182) reports: "Arriving at the station, he said, 'It is extraordinary. I have not been here for ten years, and yet the stationmaster still recognised me.'"



# Good genes and bad science

Should anything be off-limits to research? DAVID HAMBLING looks at the rise of racial pop-science

The term “Racial Science” reeks of smug Victorian colonialists, 20<sup>th</sup>-century eugenics promoting compulsory sterilisation, and Nazi propaganda. These days few science departments would consider allowing work in such a toxic area. It is not a question of damned data, more an entire field damned to obscurity. But racial science has still found a place in the popular agenda, thanks to a shift in politics and some pop sci bestsellers.

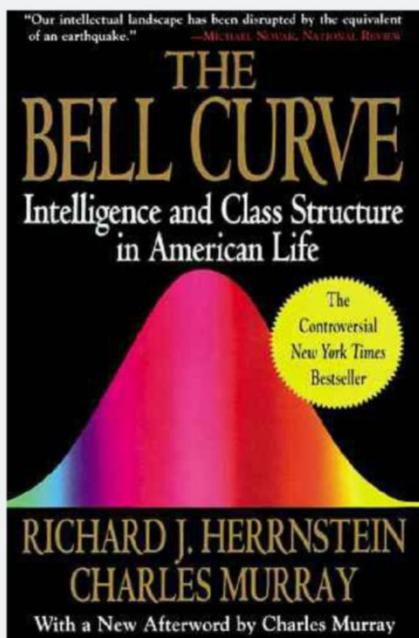
President Trump’s attitude is symptomatic. He has repeatedly credited himself with having “good genes” and talks about his children and grandchildren in the same way, apparently believing their success is a matter of breeding rather than billionaire parents. “Good genes”, the modern version of the “good breeding” which made aristocrats naturally superior to commoners, are a popular belief among conservatives, assuring them that their wealth and position are justified.

The roots of current thinking lie in *The Bell Curve*, a 1994 book by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray. The book has never really gone away – it is currently number 8 in the Sociology section of Amazon.com. In it, the authors claim that the social differences and inequalities between black and white Americans can be explained by inherited differences in IQ. They downplay the significance of history and the aftermath of slavery, instead suggesting that black people are less intelligent, and this is why, for example, there is more crime in black neighbourhoods and black people have less well-paid jobs.

*The Bell Curve* was met by an avalanche of criticism. *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert called it “a scabrous piece of racial pornography masquerading as serious scholarship.” Innumerable books followed, attacking its methods, assumptions and conclusions and putting forward powerful counter-arguments. None came close to the popularity of the original.

Perhaps the most cogent argument against *The Bell Curve* is the finding by psychologists that IQ is the result of poverty and lack of opportunity rather than the cause. IQ correlates highly with literacy; anyone who has not been taught to read properly has a lower IQ. Similarly, children brought up in dull environments with little stimulation – typically the poor – have lower IQs. And, as social conditions improve, so does measured intelligence.

The Flynn Effect is a well-known but still puzzling gradual rise in intelligence from generation to generation. Better schooling, better nutrition and a more complex and stimulating environment thanks to the greater availability of books, then television, video



*Wade's book was denounced in a letter signed by more than 100 professors*

games and computers may all play a part. Some sectors of society have risen more than others, and the changes that give rise to the Flynn Effect have closed the gap between black and white Americans over the last few decades. That would hardly be possible if intelligence were a matter of race rather than environment.

More recently, Nicholas Wade's 2014 book *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History* argued that racial intelligence differences are genetic and amplified by culture. Black people are poor because they have “bad genes” and the effect is exacerbated by their inferior culture. The book was promptly denounced in a letter signed by more than 100 professors of biology and genetics published in the *New York Times*. Again, this has not stopped it from being highly influential. Telling people what they want to hear sells books.

More subtly, works like Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* make arguments based on culture rather than race per se. While not explicitly citing the genetic superiority of the Chinese, Chua suggests that sociology can explain the superior performance of children raised with traditional Chinese values.

Chua's book is, however, a mild and even humorous version of a prevalent view in China, where the superiority of the majority Han ethnic group is taken for granted. Some Chinese palaeontologists even believe that the Han came from a separate process of evolution, hinting that they are a more advanced version of humanity. This stands in contrast to the accepted ‘out of Africa’ model of human evolution which suggests a common origin for everyone, but it plays better with Chinese nationalists.

Nationalism is on the rise globally, and feeling against migrants has rarely run higher. Again, Trump's border wall is a symptom. Anything that supports the view that outsiders are inferior tends to be seized on, and popular science works ‘explaining’ racial difference will continue to win an audience, however shaky their foundations.

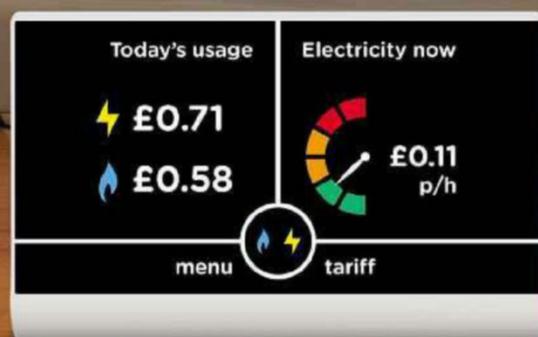
Mainstream science, meanwhile, can at best play a purely defensive game. Scientific method demands an open mind; setting out to prove racial equality would be unscientific. Far worse though, is the danger that the slightest scrap of research data taken out of context could fuel extremism. No research institution could survive the resulting media storm unscathed, so nobody is willing to risk it.

Science does, however, sometimes bite back. Perhaps the most entertaining example of this is research by sociologists at the University of California, Los Angeles entitled “When Genetics Challenges a Racist's Identity: Genetic Ancestry Testing Among White Nationalists.” The research, published in August 2017, looked at discussions on the white supremacist forum Stormfront about DNA tests for ethnic origins. White nationalists take these tests to prove their credentials, anticipating Viking blood, or suitably Nordic stock. They are not always pleased with the results. When they discovered ‘non-European’ genes, some of the subjects concluded that the tests themselves were not valid, or that deliberately inaccurate data was being returned because of a Jewish (of course!) conspiracy. Others sought to redefine whiteness.

It could be argued that nothing should be off-limits to science and that real scientific research is needed into the “unexplained phenomena” that *The Bell Curve* purports to explain. However, in the current climate, researchers have to treat lightly when it comes to exploring racial difference. We may have sequenced our own genome and unlocked many of the mysteries of what it means to be human, but this is one area where science leaves the field to those who are less interested in the truth than their own agenda.

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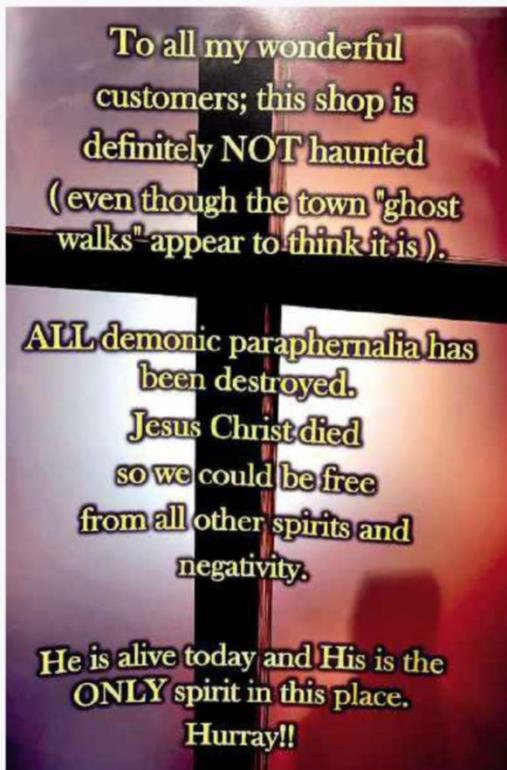


# Martin Luther's Hallowe'en

ALAN MURDIE considers Protestantism's influence on our modern concepts of ghosts and spirits

**O**n 9 October 2017 BBC News reported the action of an aggrieved Norfolk shopkeeper, Mr Nigel Parrott, 56, of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, in displaying an anti-ghost walk poster in his store window. His protest arose through being fed up with the inclusion of his 'Sweet Dreams' sweetshop in a local ghost walk, on account of Ouija board séances allegedly once held there before Mr Parrott opened his confectionary business. Including a strongly religious message in his notice, he insisted that all "demonic paraphernalia" had been removed and that Jesus was "the only spirit" in his shop and that "Jesus Christ died so we could be free from all other spirits and negativity". Mr Parrott also refrains from promoting Hallowe'en-themed sweets, concentrating his efforts on Bonfire Night and Remembrance Sunday. A local ghost walk organiser has offered sincere apologies for offence caused. (*BBC News 9 Oct; Yarmouth Mercury, 11 Oct 2017*).

I rather admire Mr Parrott in his bold individual assertion of strict traditional Protestantism and his resolute gesture against commercialised spooky culture. Walking the high streets of Britain last autumn, ahead of 31 October, even the most myopic of casual strollers will have noticed numerous shops and businesses awash with a veritable tide of decorative Hallowe'en pumpkins, witches' hats, cardboard arachnids, plastic skulls and other sundry spooky and ghoulish ornaments displayed as lures for customers. Equally noticeable were people presenting such merchandise in the front windows and porches of their homes. Come Hallowe'en night itself, copying the example in urban areas of the United States, many British towns and cities saw parades of children in fancy dress, their ranks swollen this year by a considerable number of grown adults likewise garbed as witches, ghouls, monsters, and devils from the Pit. With some individuals the degree of fancy dress and personal makeover required to achieve this effect appeared negligible. Yet almost nowhere within this Hallowe'en frenzy was any tribute to the forerunner of Mr Parrott who made it all possible. I refer not to some advertising guru or team of marketing geniuses from the United States, blamed on no evidence by barometer of popular taste



LEFT: Norfolk sweetshop proprietor Nigel Parrott reassures his customers that Jesus Christ is the only resident spirit.

this began the theological fracturing of Christendom that became the Protestant Reformation.

To be fair, this significant 500th anniversary was given some attention by sections of the thinking religious press, history journals and the more highbrow sections of the media, though Luther's choice of date and involvement with ghost beliefs aroused no great interest. But among many historical consequences still with us today, Luther's action had profound effects upon how the Western world approaches ghosts and the supernatural in general. In short, Protestantism carved out the cultural space where these ideas now flourish as strongly as ever. Indeed, it seems possible Luther selected Hallowe'en 1517 for maximum impact, the choice of date being a direct and calculated challenge to many Catholic dogmas formulated in the Middle Ages, especially doctrines concerning the fate of the dead and the role of Purgatory, an intermediate afterlife domain that was neither Heaven nor Hell. By the time Luther wrote, the festivals of All Saints' (1 November) and All Souls' (2 November) had been going strong for centuries, having begun at Cluny in 991.

For believing Catholics, ghosts represented the spirits of the dead in Purgatory, on a kind of ticket-of-leave or nocturnal-release scheme whereby they might temporarily revisit former homes and friends, often imploring those living to purify them by prayers and masses of expiation for all sins not meriting eternal damnation. Belief that terms in Purgatory could be reduced or avoided led to devotees leaving money to fund masses for their souls after death – effectively one could purchase early release. Some worshippers endowed portions of parish churches and special ecclesiastical buildings known as chantries, where the necessary prayers might be recited. Relics of these are detectable in many places around England, as surviving features in churches or commemorated in road and estate names where worshippers once conversed, prayed and pleaded for the dead. The business of praying could go on for generations – at one religious foundation

## Luther's action had profound effects upon how the Western world approaches ghosts

Jeremy Clarkson (*Sunday Times*, 6 Nov 2017) for piggy-backing on the traditional state-sanctioned anarchy of Bonfire Night, thereby resulting in "two weekends on the trot where nobody gets any sleep".

Rather the actual originator of Hallowe'en may come as a surprise, particularly to Mr Parrott and a number of other evangelical Christians who like him deplore it. For a significant share of the responsibility for creating the communal modern Hallowe'en festival goes back some 500 years to another religious protest notice, that issued in 1517 by the German monk and theologian Martin Luther (1483-1546). According to popular legend Luther's nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle church door at Wittenberg; more historical is that on 31 October that year he sent it out to Albert of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Mainz. From

in Essex, prayers were observed for over a century after the death of the benefactor.

Luther considered all this unbiblical and an excuse for financial exploitation. For Luther there was no halfway house in Purgatory where the dead waited for prayers from the living to release them. The dead either went to Heaven, if they were saved by the grace of Christ, or were consigned to Hell for eternity. Proclaiming sponsored prayers and monetary bequests for remission of sins as superstitious nonsense, Luther declared apparitions as wicked deceits perpetrated by Popish priests or by the Devil himself.

In the lands adopting Protestantism, praying for souls in Purgatory was rejected, shaping the law governing charitable bequests in Reformation England. Legacies for promoting religion were classed as charitable gifts, but any bequest for the saying of Masses for the dead might fall outside legitimate charitable purposes. Grey areas abounded; for example, monuments inscribed 'pray for the soul of X' were still the subject of serious litigation into the 1960s (also providing a suitably obscure point to test law students sitting 'Equity and Trusts' papers in law exams). The possibility of dead souls returning was also rejected by strict Lutherans.

Nonetheless, the problem remained that ghosts continued to appear to credible witnesses, including faithful Protestants. Ghost experiences provoked ardent disputation between the Catholic and Reformed Churches over the precise nature of these visions. One approach was to treat all sightings with suspicion, as did the Protestant Swiss theologian Ludwig Lavater, author of *De Spectris* (1570) (translated as 'Of Ghostes and Spriates Walking by Nyght', 1572/1929), who presented many sceptical arguments still ventilated today (misperception, intoxication, mental disturbance etc).

From the later 16th century to the end of the 17th century, Britain produced much book and pamphlet literature focusing on apparitions and their implications, reaching a peak between about 1640 and 1680. Historian John Newton identifies different and complex interpretative strategies in arguments over whether ghosts of the dead might be the mask of devils in disguise, or angels (the latter being a greatly amplified class of entity whom Luther refused to formally venerate). (John Newton, *Early Modern Ghosts: Proceedings of the Early Modern Ghosts Conference Held at St John's College, Durham University 24 March 2001*; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 1970).

With a perfect piece of English compromise, Daniel Defoe later proposed ghosts might be 'daimons', morally neutral spirits, neither good nor evil. However, the

interpretation of common folk in Great Britain varied, and with the passage of time Protestant views became less definite. Many late 17th-century cases from England, collected by John Aubrey in 1696, featured apparitions delivering complex verbal messages to percipients, commonly asking for some service to be performed, or some task completed, putting right a wrong committed by the deceased. It was difficult ascribing such positive goals to demonic activity.

The breaking of the Catholic interpretive monopoly concerning the supernatural had two opposite but complimentary effects. Freed from Roman authority, Protestants devised personal paths to salvation from Scripture and enjoyed greater liberty of conscience and thought. All manner of beliefs and ideas blossomed. On the one hand, this stimulated scepticism toward supernatural phenomena (including ultimately religion itself), and on the other encouraged magical beliefs and occult dabbling. A spirit of rational enquiry that formally discarded many specifically Catholic miracles simultaneously boosted an emerging scientific attitude and a belief in witchcraft. As shown by Bob Rickard (see **FT357:44-50**), both tendencies can be detected amongst founders of the Royal Society who engaged simultaneously in experimentation with occult and mainstream physical sciences. Contrary to popular thinking, witch persecutions were generally not conducted in an atmosphere of emotional frenzy. Trials could be ponderous in the extreme; and providing the intellectual climate for witch hunting were the scholars and rationalists: "With

few exceptions the authors of treatises advocating witch hunts were cultivated, erudite and eminently respected." (See Henry More (1614–1687), *Tercentenary Studies with a biography and bibliography*, 1989, edited by Robert Crocker).

The Reformation led to a declining acceptance of the physicality of apparitions and miracles. Catholic nations still venerated the relics of dead saints as being imbued with miraculous and curative properties (e.g. St Januarius's blood at Naples and the Turin Shroud). In Orthodox lands the re-animated dead returned as vampires. But in Protestant states alleged post-mortem manifestations became ethereal and subjective. At the Reformation Protestants also lost many traditional ritual defensive methods against the malevolent supernatural, such as exorcism, holy water and crucifixes, all seen as Popish superstitions.

Yet neither the thirst for the supernatural, nor fear of it, disappeared. The removal of the Catholic rites around All Hallows' and All Souls' Day arguably left a spiritual vacuum in which all manner of alternative customs could thrive. Today, no matter how a minority of strict evangelical Christians may deplore Hallowe'en as an invitation to the diabolic, its very celebration reflects just how effective Protestantism has been in banishing Catholic seasonal ritual from the Anglo-Saxon world. As Professor Ronald Hutton states: "If so many of those traditions now appear to be divorced from Christianity, this is precisely because of the success of early reformers in driving them out of the churches and away from the clerics" (See *Stations of the Sun: A History*



TOP: A 19th century painting shows Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle church, Wittenberg, Germany; historians now dispute whether this legendary event actually occurred.



# GHOSTWATCH

of the Ritual Year in Britain, 1993.)

However, whilst there is no doubting Luther's influence on thinking about ghosts, one cannot ascribe all Hallowe'en customs, rituals and carry-ons in the centuries that followed, including the secularised and commercialised festivals of today, to the impact of the Reformation. After Protestants condemned the supernatural and witches and spooks as either Popish frauds or the Devil, how did it all come back into Hallowe'en? After all, people do not take to the streets dressed as witches and devils out of respect for Protestant theology.

The development of manifold customs at Hallowe'en was an issue explored on 8 November 2017 at the annual Katherine Briggs Lecture held by the Folklore Society at the Warburg Institute, London, with Professor Nick Groom of Exeter University addressing the theme, "Hallowe'en and Valentine: The Culture of Saints' Days in the English-Speaking World". His interesting review exposed post-Reformation Hallowe'en customs as amazingly diverse, including fooling, begging, games, mischief, divination for finding one's future spouse, and a strong early 18th century passion for cracking and consuming nuts. Little of the malign supernatural or sombre commemoration of the dead is identifiable in surviving texts. The change in perceptions appears driven in 1785 by Scottish poet Robert Burns, with his poem *Hallowe'en*. Declared "incomprehensible without Burns's footnotes, the first of these averring Hallowe'en, "to be a night when witches, devils, and other mischief-making beings are abroad on their baleful midnight errands; particularly those aerial people the fairies, are said on that night to hold a grand anniversary". Given wide circulation, thereafter Hallowe'en tradition both narrows and re-invigorates itself, gathering up elements from around the UK, Ireland and later the USA. The sometimes rowdy, burlesque and prankish elements which accompany Hallowe'en today are no modern invention.

Perhaps this is wholly appropriate, since nuisance and physical disturbance was one thing Luther admitted regarding ghost reports. His one major concession to the material supernatural was the existence of invisible, noisy, object-throwing entities, being the first writer to employ the term *poltergeist* for these largely domestic persecutions (thanks to Guy Lyon Playfair for bringing this to my attention). Luther continued a Teutonic fashion for coining new terms for such phenomena, such as *klopfegeist* (rapping spirit) or labelling them



LEFT: The former prison at Shepton Mallet, Somerset.

that looks rather raw". Apparently, formerly sceptical about ghosts, Mr Toole stated, "I have seen and witnessed truly terrifying things when taking people around on tours in the daytime."

The fiery hand of a soul in torment? Perhaps, although Lee Davis was hanged rather than frying in the electric chair. It is not the first occasion a former institution for unfortunate inmates at Shepton Mallet has been reported as haunted; the old workhouse in town was claimed as haunted back in 2005 (*Western Daily Press*, 24 Jan 2005). But it may be noted that just one week after his mysterious injury, Mr Toole – seemingly recovered from any trauma – was promoting commercial ghost tours inside the building on behalf of Jailhouse Tours. He told the *Bristol Post*: "This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for people who want to spend a night in prison" and "have the fright of their lives". Those brave enough to take up the offer would receive the "full prisoner experience including bland porridge for dinner and breakfast, and a sleepover locked in their very own cell". Mr Toole stated: "From my experiences, I'm fully confident that there are spirits of former prisoners who were executed here, so this overnight tour is definitely not one for the faint-hearted." By mid-October parties of up to 30 ghost hunters were attending. (*Bristol Post*, 12+20 Sept, 13 Oct; *Sun*, 24 Sept 2005).

It will be interesting to watch developments, and if his tour goes the way of those at the Covenanter's Prison in Greyfriars Kirkyard, Scotland, where over-excited participants complained of physical touches, scratches and bruises attributed to an aggressive poltergeist. This was despite the area having no record of any haunting, save in children's folklore, until a ghost walk began in the 1990s (see *The Ghost that Haunted Itself*, 2001, by Jan-Andrew Henderson; *Haunted Edinburgh*, 2008, by Alan Murdie).

Thus, physically troublesome ghosts remain a social reality, continuing to fascinate. Indeed, an academic nod of approval for further study was reflected in the selection by the Folklore Society of '*Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose*' by Chris Josiffe (reviewed **FT356:59**), a book examining the most bizarre poltergeist of the 20th century, as winner of this year's Katherine Briggs book prize. Of course, that is presuming that '*Gef*' was a poltergeist, not a priest or devil in disguise...



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## MOTHER/CLUCKER

A four-year-old Indonesian black macaque named Niv holds a young chicken at the Ramat Gan Safari Park near Tel Aviv. She adopted the bird when it wondered into the macaques' enclosure. Niv spends her time caressing, cleaning and playing with the bird and zoo officials say the unlikely pair have become inseparable. "It seems

that Niv, who is four years old and has reached the age of sexual maturity, has difficulty finding a partner," the zoo's spokeswoman Mor Porat said. "This probably explains the maternal instinct she expresses to this chicken." Porat added that the chicken "seems very happy to have found a surrogate mother. At night they sleep together." *D. Telegraph, 25 Aug 2017.*

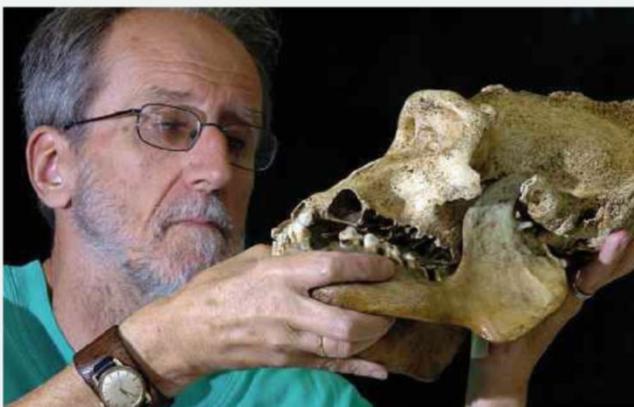
PHOTO: JACK GUEZ/ AFP / GETTY IMAGES





KARL SHUKER mourns a cryptozoological loss and grins and bears some bad news for yetis

COLIN GROVES



RAYMOND ROIG / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Colin Groves with a deformed skull of a male mountain gorilla found in Rwanda. ABOVE: Is the yeti really a Tibetan brown bear?

#### RIP PROFESSOR COLIN GROVES

I am very sad to announce the death on 30 November of Professor Colin P Groves, based at the Australian National University in Canberra. He was 75. One of the world's leading mammal taxonomists, specialising particularly in biological anthropology, Prof. Groves also had a longstanding interest in cryptozoology. He had contributed papers to the scientific journal of the now-defunct International Society of Cryptozoology, had acted as a reviewer for papers submitted to the current *Journal of Cryptozoology* for which I act as editor, and had been involved in identifying and describing a sizeable number of major new mammal species down through the years. Some of these had actually been hidden in plain sight inasmuch as their existence had long been known to science but their identity as distinct species in their own right had not previously been suspected.

Among those so recognised and duly delineated by Prof. Groves and co-workers were a new species of warthog, a new gazelle, several other notable ungulates, a new fossil human *Homo ergaster*, a new genus of bushbaby, plus major taxonomic revisions of the African elephants and gorillas, and most recently a new species of orangutan. He and I corresponded on numerous occasions, and he was especially encouraging regarding my research for my three books on new and rediscovered animals, supplying me with much new information and leads.

Cryptozoology is often thought, particularly by outsiders, to take place principally in the field, seeking strange and exotic beasts in remote, distant localities far from civilisation, but the numerous discoveries made by Prof. Groves and the museum-oriented manner in which he did so eloquently demonstrate otherwise. As he once stated in an interview: "There's two ways of discovering new species. One is by slogging through the jungle in

your pith helmet and binoculars, spotting an animal and saying 'by Jove, I don't recognise that!' The other way is looking through museums, looking at specimens in drawers and finding species that have not been properly classified". Thanks to his untiring work in the latter capacity, many such species, long unrecognised, have now been properly classified, and his profound influence upon successive generations of research students ensures that many more will be too – a wonderful legacy indeed, from that rarest of beings, namely a mainstream zoologist who was also more than happy to contribute both indirectly and directly to cryptozoological research and advancement. Our sincere condolences here at FT go to Prof. Groves's family, friends, and numerous colleagues worldwide.

[www.cryptozoonews.com/groves-obit/](http://www.cryptozoonews.com/groves-obit/); [www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/vale-emeritus-professor-colin-groves](http://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/vale-emeritus-professor-colin-groves), 30 Nov 2017.

#### NEW YETI FINDINGS HARD TO BEAR?

Some more supposed yeti relics have been the focus of phylogenetic analyses of mitochondrial DNA sequences, in order to determine their taxonomic identities, and once again they have been found to be from bears (plus, in one instance, a dog), rather than from any species of primate, known or unknown. The results have recently been released in a *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* paper, whose team of researchers was led by Dr Charlotte Lindqvist from the University at Buffalo in NYC, USA. Nine different specimens, now housed in museums and private collections but all claimed to have originated from yetis by the various local people from whom they had been obtained, were examined. The outcome of the tests was that with the exception of an alleged yeti tooth that was found to be from a domestic dog, all of

the specimens were from Himalayan and Tibetan brown bears.

Cryptozoological sceptics have been quick to claim on social media and elsewhere that these findings confirm that the yeti as an unknown species of primate is fiction, that it is unquestionably merely a bear, and a known form at that. In reality, of course, they confirm nothing of the sort – all that they do confirm is that the individual creatures from which those eight samples derived were bears. The Himalayas constitute a vast, frequently inaccessible terrain where an undiscovered primate might readily exist – or even more than one such form, as traditional yeti lore and eyewitness descriptions consistently delineate three morphologically discrete types, not just one, and all of which are adamantly claimed by locals to be humanoid, not ursine. Even Dr Lindquist herself is quoted in one newspaper interview as stating: "You can never for sure prove that there is nothing out there".

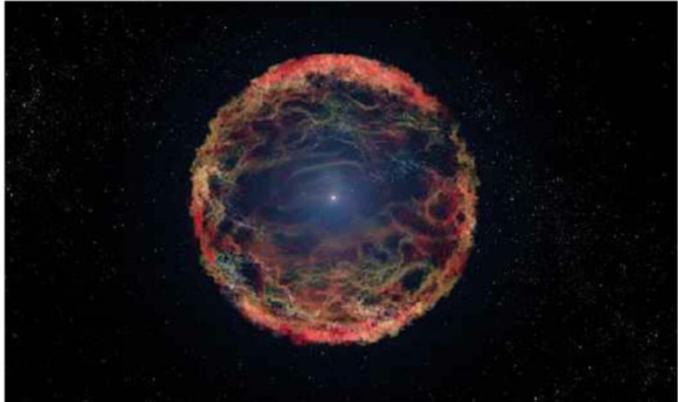
True, the impossibility of proving a negative can give free rein to all manner of wild, unrestrained supposition in any field of study, but the very sizeable archive of detailed anecdotal evidence on file obtained from local and western observers alike over many decades of cryptozoological investigation remains sufficiently persuasive for this cryptid's supporters to deem it unlikely that all such sightings merely involve bears and that locals are unable to distinguish such commonplace beasts from something that they claim to be much more intelligent, and much more human. To be continued.

<http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/284/1868/20171804>, 29 Nov; [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/yetis-just-bears-science\\_us\\_5a1f0135e4b0d52b8dc242db](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/yetis-just-bears-science_us_5a1f0135e4b0d52b8dc242db), 29 Nov; <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/11/yeti-legends-real-animals-dna-bears-himalaya-science/>, 29 Nov 2017.



# SPACE IS THE PLACE

Elongated asteroid passes through, astronomers puzzled by slow-motion supernova, and Earth faces catastrophe



ABOVE LEFT: 'Oumuamua – an Empire State Building-sized asteroid. ABOVE RIGHT: An artist's impression of a supernova. FACING PAGE: Let's all move to Proxima B.

## POINTY OBJECT FROM AFAR

An asteroid discovered about 20 million miles away on 19 October, known as 'Oumuamua, is one of the most elongated cosmic objects known to science. Its speed and trajectory strongly suggest it originated in a planetary system outside our own. Astronomers scrambled to observe the unique rock before it fades from view. It appears to be at least 10 times longer than it is wide, a ratio more extreme than that of any asteroid or comet ever observed in our Solar System. There is nothing natural that comes close to it in shape and no process of nature we know of that could have shaped it, though one suggestion is that it was shot away from its home star by a supernova explosion. Scientists from the Breakthrough Listen project, which searches for evidence of alien civilisations, monitored the rock on four different radio transmission bands. "Most likely it is of natural origin, but because it is so peculiar, we would like to check if it has any sign of artificial origin, such as radio emissions," said Avi Loeb, professor of astronomy at Harvard.

Using observations from the Very Large Telescope in Chile, Karen Meech, from the Institute for Astronomy in Honolulu, Hawaii, and colleagues determined that 'Oumuamua was about 400m (1,312ft) long – slightly shorter

than the Empire State Building – rapidly rotating, brightening and dimming dramatically every 7.3 hours, giving a clue to its bizarre shape. "One has to realise we don't know where the rotation pole is pointed," said Dr Meech. "We assumed that it was perpendicular to the line of sight. If it were tipped over at all, then there are projection effects and the 10:1 is a minimum. It could be more elongated!"

'Oumuamua – pronounced oh-MOO-a-MOO-a – means "a scout or messenger from afar arriving first" in Hawaiian. It has a reddish colour, similar to objects in the outer Solar System, and is completely inert, without the faintest hint of dust around it. These properties suggest that 'Oumuamua is dense, comprising rock and possibly metals, has no water or ice, and that its surface was reddened due to the effects of irradiation from cosmic rays over long periods of time. Although it formed around another star, scientists think it could have been wandering through the Milky Way, unattached to any star system, for hundreds of millions of years before its chance encounter with our Solar System. It appears to have come from the general direction of where the Vega star system is now (25 light years away in the northern constellation of Lyra), which should make any space nerd squeal with glee as Vega

featured in the novel and movie *Contact*. Unfortunately, it wasn't actually in that part of the sky when the asteroid was there 300,000 years ago, according to the European Southern Observatory.

The cosmic interloper was discovered by Rob Weryk, a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Astronomy and a co-author of the new study, which is published in *Nature*. Weryk realised it was going fast enough to avoid being captured by the Sun's gravitational pull, and was on a very eccentric trajectory taking it out of our Solar System, bound for the Pegasus constellation. It reached a peak speed of 196,000mph (315,500km/h) as it swept past the Sun. By next May it will be passing Jupiter. *Guardian*, 28 Oct, 11 Dec; *BBC News*, *mashable.com*, 20 Nov; *D.Mail*, 22 Nov; *NY Times*, 24 Nov 2017.

## GOLD IN VAST QUANTITIES

Gold forged from the titanic collision of two super-dense stars has made an alchemist's dream come true 130 million light years from Earth. Enough gold to match the mass of 200 Earths was created in the nuclear furnace lit by merging neutron stars in a galaxy called NGC 4993. It also created huge quantities of platinum and uranium and other heavy elements such as lead. The spectacular event was recorded by astronomers in the US on

17 August 2017 and generated ripples in the fabric of the Universe, leading to the fifth detection of gravitational waves on Earth. (The first discovery of such waves was in September 2015, confirming a prediction made by Einstein a century ago and earning Nobel Prizes for Rainer Weiss, Kip Thorne and Barry Barish.) Scientists not only 'heard' the collision by measuring vibrations in space-time, but also used satellite and ground-based telescopes to see light and radiation pouring out of the stellar fireball, dubbed a 'kilonova'.

Every other gravitational wave detection has been traced to black holes crashing together in remote regions of the Universe more than a billion light years away. The new event – though still very distant – was much closer and completely different in nature. It was caused by colliding neutron stars – burnt out remnants of giant stars so dense that a teaspoon of their material on Earth would weigh a billion tons. The two objects, each about 12 miles (19km) in diameter, stretched and distorted space-time as they spiralled towards each other and finally collided. The discovery also solved the mystery of what creates short-wave gamma ray bursts picked up on Earth, and could help pinpoint how fast the Universe is expanding. *NY Times*, 4 Oct; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, *Guardian*, 17 Oct 2017.

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## ZOMBIE STAR

A star has refused to die after suffering many massive explosions that would normally be expected to be fatal. It is the first time astronomers have seen the same star explode repeatedly, and there is no current theory to explain it adequately. Until now stellar explosions, or supernovæ, have been considered singular events, the dazzling death throes of stars that have burned up all their fuel.

The curiosity came to light after astronomers detected a supernova half a billion light years away in the constellation of the Great Bear in September 2014. When stars explode at the end of their lives, they can shine with the brightness of 100 million suns for three months or more before they fade away. The 2014 supernova shone for more than two years, during which its brightness rose and fell at least five times. An even earlier explosion appears to have happened in 1954 when a burst of light was detected from the same location. Calculations show that there is a 95-99% chance it was the same star.

According to the “pulsational pair-instability model”, stars with masses of at least 100 suns can explode multiple times before dying, with each blast sending vast amounts of material into space. Now and again, material rushing away from the star can catch up with older ejected material, producing bright flashes of light as it collides. This theory doesn’t explain all the observed phenomena in this case, but it’s the only one that comes close. “One thing we can tell from the supernova is how long ago the star exploded,” said Iair Arcavi at Las Cumbres observatory in

California. “The weird thing is that even two years later, it looks like a two-month-old supernova.” It is as if the star exploded in slow motion. More recent observations suggest that the 2014 explosion may be its last. Before long the centre of the supernova, where a black hole now lurks, should be visible, using the Hubble space telescope. *Guardian*, 9 Nov 2017.

## TIME TO QUIT

The human race must start leaving Earth within 30 years to avoid being wiped out by over-population, climate change or an asteroid strike, Prof Stephen Hawking has warned. Addressing the Starmus science festival in Trondheim, Norway, the astrophysicist said it was crucial to establish colonies on Mars and the Moon, and take a Noah’s Ark of plants, animals, fungi and insects. He also suggested leaving the Solar System and venturing to Alpha Centauri, where there seems to be a habitable planet known as Proxima B. Being a “cosmic sloth” was not an option, he said, because “the threats are too big and too numerous. I am convinced that humans need to leave. The Earth is becoming too small for us, our physical resources are being drained at an alarming rate. We have given our planet the disastrous gift of climate change, rising temperatures, the reducing of polar ice caps, deforestation and decimation of animal species.” He added that the Earth would eventually be hit by a devastating asteroid strike. “This is not science fiction, it is guaranteed by the laws of physics and probability,” he said. “To stay risks being annihilated.” *D. Telegraph*, 21 June 2017.



## 220: THE LITTLE URN



### The myth

Every couple of years, the national cricket teams of Australia and England compete for a trophy called The Ashes, an urn containing a bail burned during a mock funeral for English cricket following Australia's first victory on English soil.

### The “truth”

Responding to that first Australian victory, in 1882, the *Sporting Times* published a satirical obituary notice to English cricket which concluded: “The body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia.” When England set off a fortnight later for the return series in Australia, team captain Ivo Bligh publicly stated that his goal was to “recover those ashes” – although no actual ashes yet existed. At some stage during that tour (no one quite knows when, but it was probably after a friendly match in Victoria) someone (probably some young women) burned something (a bail, a stump, a ball and a lady’s veil have all been suggested) and put the ashes in a tiny terracotta (or perhaps silver) urn, and presented it, as a jest, to Bligh. England won the series; however, the Ashes “returned” to England not as a trophy, but as Bligh’s personal souvenir of the trip during which he met his future wife. They were mostly forgotten about for 20 years; it wasn’t until 1903 that “The Ashes” came into universal use as the name of sport’s oldest rivalry. *Wisden*, cricket’s bible, didn’t use the phrase until 1905. The urn itself sat on Bligh’s mantelpiece until his death in 1927, when his widow presented it to Lord’s – though some scholars believe that it was a different urn, and/or that its original contents had by then been lost and replaced by ashes from Bligh’s fireplace. In any case, the urn has never been formally used as a trophy.

### Sources

*The Cricket Paper*, 20 Oct 2017; [www.lords.org/history/mcc-history/the-ashes/](http://www.lords.org/history/mcc-history/the-ashes/); [www.espncricinfo.com/the-ashes-2013/content/story/259985.html](http://www.espncricinfo.com/the-ashes-2013/content/story/259985.html); [www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/cricket/international/theashes/10169521/Ashes-2013-the-myth-of-the-urn.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/cricket/international/theashes/10169521/Ashes-2013-the-myth-of-the-urn.html); [www.cricketcountry.com/articles/ivo-bligh-the-hero-of-cricket-s-immortal-love-story-115521](http://www.cricketcountry.com/articles/ivo-bligh-the-hero-of-cricket-s-immortal-love-story-115521)

### Disclaimer

The Ashes story is famously unclear in its details, so if you catch us out in any slips, do bowl them at FT’s letters page.



# STRANGE DAYS

## NECROLOG

This issue, we salute a much-decorated Soviet aviation pioneer who turned to fortean research and shed a tear for Myanmar's own 'ET' as she phones home...



KESTONE / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

### MARINA POPOVICH

A highly decorated test pilot for the Soviet Union and one of the most famous female aviators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Popovich 'retired' to pursue UFOs and other mysteries. Testing over 40 aircraft types – earning the nickname 'Madame MiG' – she set 102 aviation records, including the longest flight by a woman.

Evacuated with her family during World War II, she worked her way up the post-war Communist system to gain high esteem, ultimately having a star in the constellation of cancer named after her for her services to aeronautics. She was honoured as a Hero of Socialist Labour and awarded the Order of Labour Red Banner. In 2007, she was also awarded the Order of Courage by president Putin for a lifetime of service to the nation. Besides her flying skills, she was a celebrated author who published nine books and two film screenplays.

Marina married famous Soviet astronaut Pavel Popovich in 1955 and had two daughters – Natalya and Oksana. Popovich almost became the first man in space but lost out to Yuri Gagarin, for whose flight he served as CapCom controller. He did go into space soon after aboard Vostok 4 and was set to command the Soviet Moon landing mission until the US

beat Russia to it.

Upon retirement as a cosmonaut in 1984, Pavel Popovich was put in charge of the UFO team assigned to the Investigation Committee for Anomalous Aerial Phenomena. It recorded much UFO activity including some involving space missions. Before his death in 2009, he himself described an encounter with a triangular object above a plane full of scientists returning from discussions in Washington.

Marina was also intrigued by the UFO mystery reported by her fellow pilots and had access to a great deal of confidential information gathered from the sources that had been cultivated by her husband. She stated that at no time was she put under any pressure not to report her findings openly. In 1991, she addressed a University of California-Berkeley conference on UFOs, at which she claimed that Soviet scientists had placed a blood sample inside a purported UFO landing site, which had subsequently undergone chemical changes. She displayed what she claimed to be the last photograph taken by the Russian probe *Phobos* 2, showing an unexplained cylindrical figure, before it disappeared without trace in 1989, just after arriving at Mars.

In 2003, she published (in Germany) *UFO Glasnost* – a book about UFOs, not exclusively from Russia. Indeed, during her husband's time heading the investigation team, attempts had been made to obtain data from witnesses outside of the Soviet bloc. These include letters from Moscow scientists to UFO witnesses such as Alan Godfrey who had a close encounter in Todmorden, West Yorkshire in 1980 [see FT325:27, 326:27] concerning his own and the infamous Rendlesham Forest case just a month later. In 2017 Godfrey revealed in his memoirs that these questions about

Rendlesham Forest came from Moscow when that case was not yet public knowledge in the UK. The MoD interviewed him over these communications.

In her 2003 book, Marina Popovich claimed that over 3,000 Soviet pilots had reported their own sightings to the official investigation team, establishing beyond doubt the existence of the phenomenon. She also claimed that the KGB had investigated the site of several 'UFO crashes' and recovered debris for analysis. They included well-known incidents such as the 1908 explosion over Tunguska and the crash of an object at Dalnagorsk in 1986. Many of these events are considered to be likely due to meteors or comets, but she alleges that some puzzling results came from the analyses of the debris – including high gold content at Dalnagorsk.

In 2014, she sent a message to the US government urging them to allow pilots and astronauts to freely report their encounters as in Russia and wanted to go over to try to compare data. In her opinion, the UFO evidence gathered during her research showed that there were "people of higher consciousness in the Universe" who were paying close attention to our activities. She saw several UFOs herself – including a 'huge ball' hanging in the sky over the Pamirs region and a 'long airship' witnessed over the sensitive location of Star City. In an interview in 1997 she recalled a close encounter while flying a MiG-21 when she saw a brightly lit object that she could only describe as a flying saucer: "We thought it could be an enemy intruder, but it was so large that this was impossible. A collision looked unavoidable but then the object tipped sideways and disappeared in a flash. It was a really scary experience."

Outside of her UFO research, Popovich had a close encounter with the Russian version of the

Yeti whilst on a research trip to the Pamirs. She met locals who described the beings that visited their village as "three metres [10ft] tall and hairy"; they scared local cats and dogs but could be made to leave with milk. She was awoken in the night by the screams of daughter Oksana, whose sleeping bag was being violently dragged from the tent. She pulled the girl back to safety and spent a sleepless night waiting for dawn. In daylight, the party found "huge bare footprints" in the churned up earth around their camp.

*Marina Lavrentievna Vasilieva, afterwards Popovich, record-breaking test pilot, writer and fortean researcher, born Velizhsky, Smolensk, Russia 20 July 1931; died 30 Nov 2017, aged 86.*

JENNY RANDLES

### SWE SWE WIN

One of the most famous soothsayers in Burma (Myanmar), Swe Swe Win advised some of Southeast Asia's most rich and powerful figures, allegedly including Than Shwe, Burmese head of state from 1992 to 2011, who made the surprise decision to move Myanmar's capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw in 2005. Many believe he ordered the upheaval on the advice of fortune-tellers (but not Swe Swe Win, who never met him in person). Known as ET – or E Thi – because of her resemblance to the much-loved alien from the 1982 movie, Swe Swe Win was a deaf-mute, so communicated with her clients in writing or through assistants from her home in Yangon.

She had also met Thaksin Shinawatra, the telecommunications tycoon who became prime minister of Thailand. He was said to have consulted her days before he was ousted in 2006 by a military coup. In a 2013 interview, her sister Thi Thi Win said ET had predicted Mr Thaksin's rise to power when he was still in "the



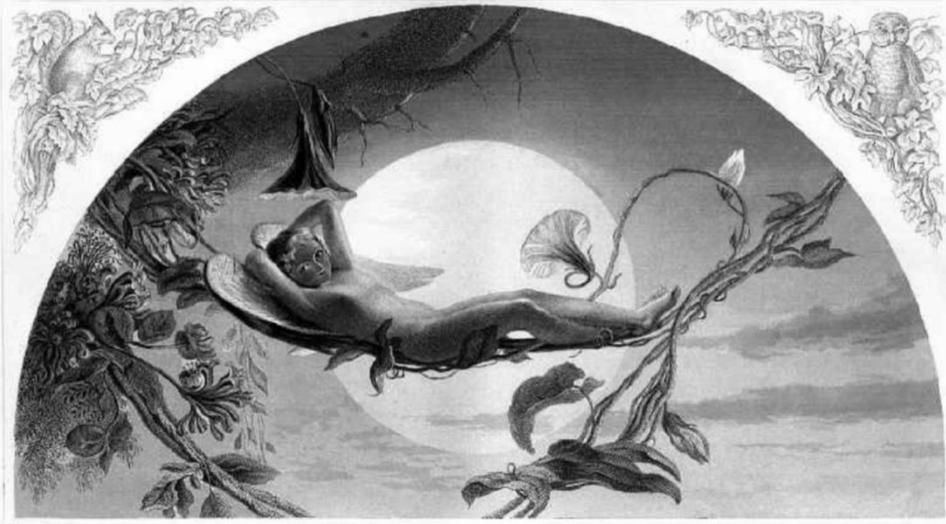
telephone business". But she added that ET's predictions were only "80 per cent" correct. Still, that did not deter her fans, who would pay hefty sums for consultations – some reports say the fees were upwards of £760 per hour. She reportedly earned around £5,200,000 a month. Her consultations would include predicting the serial number of a banknote in the client's wallet or guessing the town of their birth. Such was her fame that in 2012 a Thai TV company made an eight-episode series about her life called *Extraordinary Gift*.

Her family claimed she acquired her skills after she came down with a fever while praying at a pagoda as a small child. An alternative story is that she had lost her hearing and ability to speak during a thunderstorm – but gained the power of a higher vision. As a young girl in Pathein, she spent hours meditating before a Buddha image at Tikegyi Kyaung monastery. In 2012 she set up a humanitarian foundation in her name after undergoing eye treatment in Singapore. She also campaigned on behalf of Zaw Lin and Win Zaw Htun, the two Burmese men sentenced to death for the 2014 murder of two British backpackers on the Thai island of Koh Tao. Even her own death – and subsequent reincarnation – was something that ET apparently foresaw, according to her sister. She had previously said she would die at an early age from heart failure, but was not worried as she would be "very pretty" in her next life.

*Swe Swe Win, Burmese soothsayer known as ET, born Yangon (Rangoon), Burma c.1959; died in her sleep in Yangon 10 Sept 2017, aged 58.*



PORNCHAI KITTIWONGSAKUL / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### FAIRIES IN YOUR FACE

At present, I'm having the very great pleasure of completing the Fairy Census: 500 fairy experiences from all around the world (see my article on pp30-37 for more on the subject). Preparing the text – which will shortly be e-published, free of charge – I constantly notice peculiar patterns in sightings. Some of these are very striking and have been trailed here before: the number of people who see fairies while driving or resting in cars is, for instance, extraordinary. Usually I insist to myself that I find at least three records of a phenomenon before I share it with others: two instances can so easily be coincidence. But there are two records that I just cannot get out of my head – and so, reluctantly, I offer them here. Hopefully, someone might have a parallel for these 'face encounters' or the general laughter will put my obsession out of its misery.

We begin with a walking party in Wales in the 2000s. A mother and daughter try and catch up with some boys who have got too far ahead on the track. As they catch up, one of the boys turns and a one-inch fairy flies into the boy's face and then flies away. The fairy was: "pale gold in colour, approximately one inch in symmetrical cube/box shape"; and before we posit a rogue drone, note that the cuboid Welsh fairy gave what must have been a very small smile as it turned to fly away from

the boy.

Also in the 2000s, in California, a daughter returns home from school with her father. As she gets out of the car, she watches a five-inch long fairy fly across her father's face: her father had been smiling at his daughter. The 'obvious' explanation in both of these cases – typically, 'obvious' in matters fortean means 'least disturbing' – is that the witnesses had mistaken something in the natural world for a fairy: an insect in the case of the Welsh walk; a bird in the garage in California. This is, though, an absolute non-starter here for the simple reason that the boy walking in Wales and the father in California saw nothing. My fascination with these two episodes comes from that simple fact and three connected thoughts. First,

real animate objects (drones, birds, insects) cannot explain all such encounters. Second, it is possible that hallucinations are created by the human brain for reasons best known to itself: the Californian teen was perhaps 'triggered' by her smiling father. Third, such psychological explanations – which I generally cling to for dear life – crumble if we accept that the mother and the daughter, as the account alleges, saw the same thing on that track in Wales...

THE NUMBER  
OF PEOPLE WHO  
SEE FAIRIES  
WHILE RESTING  
OR DRIVING  
IN CARS IS  
EXTRAORDINARY

Simon Young's new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies: 500 AD to the Present* is out now from Gibson Square Books



# Never had it so good...

JENNY RANDLES traces the many changes in ufology since 1957 – the UK's happiest ever year

In 2017 – after an exhaustive survey of millions of texts published between 1776 and 2009 – a group of academics at Warwick University decided that 1957 was when happiness in the UK reached its peak.

Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister of the day, even said that most Britons had “never had it so good” in a speech he gave in July of that year, an assertion that was widely scorned. Yet post-war rationing had ended, the economy was booming, new technology meant people were able to afford houses and TVs, whilst labour-saving washing machines arrived to replace the scrubbing boards and mangles that I recall helping my mum to use for the daily wash. This era also saw the spread of computers, air travel, rock music and many new medicines that are all part of everyday life today. Yet nobody, other than the ridiculed Macmillan, seemed to register much of this or to see much cause for optimism during 1957.

Being five I only dimly recall the year. We moved from the country to urban Manchester, and at nursery school I faced daily cod liver oil and afternoon naps in ex-army blankets with bunny rabbits embroidered on them to distract from the scratchiness. I also saw the ‘cover-up’ over the major fire on 10 October at the first ever nuclear reactor at Windscale in Cumbria, when free school milk was replaced by orange juice because of fears we were never told about.

What has this got to do with ufology? Well, New Year is always a good time for reflection, so I thought it might be interesting, in the light of the above findings, to compare the subject in 1957 with its 2017 incarnation. I was inspired too by a November 2017 Internet debate between UFO researchers asking if we should refresh our entire approach to the subject, or even invent yet another version of ufology to move the field forward.

Some investigators countered such an idea, suggesting that while every generation believes it can do things better than the last, it usually just reinvents the wheel, making the same mistakes all over again, and after another couple of decades we arrive back at where we started. Ufology travels in circles to nowhere.

So, what exactly was our subject like in 1957? And has our approach altered much over the intervening 60 years?

I searched my collection of news reports from that year, seeing how long-gone media sources like the *Daily Sketch* covered the phenomenon. In many respects, it was all



ABOVE LEFT: The 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* foreshadowed many trends in the decade's UFO encounters. LEFT: Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in October 1957.

much like today, whilst in other ways it was quite different. There were sightings that proved to be new military jets, dodgy hoax photos, and the latest IFO mystery was the 60-year-old equivalent of our Chinese Lanterns: ‘luminous owls’ generating reports in Norfolk and believed to be caused by phosphorescence picked up from diseased tree bark. Cartoonists loved the subject, with UFOs even starring in a Yogi Bear strip that year.

On the flipside, erudite professors spoke out in support of UFOs and said they saw a government cover-up in evidence. Today, most say almost exactly the opposite. Dr Clifford Thornton, PhD, told *Reveille* on 9 May 1957 that 20 per cent of UFO reports were unexplained and that they came in waves every 27 months. They appeared to

be alien craft that modern science could now better accept because we understood relativity and how they might reach Earth from a distant solar system rather than our own neighbouring planets, now known to be devoid of life.

There were intriguing cases crying out for further study, such as one from 28 December 1956 and reported in January 1957 by *Empire News*, in which a man out hunting sparrow hawks in Wickford, Essex, saw a UFO emerge from mist and promptly fired a gun at it! At least he was able to answer the age-old question posed by many witnesses – would a flying saucer go ‘clang’ if you threw a rock at it – because in this case it did precisely that. In fact, the bullet bounced back off the metal surface and hit the witness, injuring him slightly and so making him the only person ever ‘shot’ by a UFO. Sceptics said he probably mistook a pylon in the fog, but he said the UFO flew away towards London several minutes later.

1957 was also remarkable for being the point of origin for a key ufological theme that would eventually come to greater prominence: the alien abduction. On 7 September at Windmill Hill, by the River Mersey in Cheshire, a man claimed to have been taken for a ride by aliens from

the planet Zomdic. In November, a woman in Birmingham met aliens and just over a year later claimed to give birth to what we might now call a genetically engineered 'space baby' (see "The Space Baby", by Andy Roberts, **FT191:32-38**). Meanwhile in Brazil a farmer called Antonio Villas Boas was abducted in his fields and engaged in another sexy experiment to create a 'hybrid' baby with a female entity (**FT188:25**).

In the middle of these unprecedented and outrageous cases, an extraordinary flap of reports occurred around Texas and New Mexico, reaching a focus on the night of 2/3 November when a dozen vehicles had their engine and lights stalled by a lens-shaped object. At the same time, an egg-shaped object was seen over the disused bunkers at White Sands where the first atomic bombs were tested a decade earlier. Remarkably, at possibly the very same moment thousands of miles away, a clean-up team from the RAF were disassembling the site at Maralinga in the Australian outback, where the most recent nuclear test had detonated in October. A UFO hovered above here in daylight and flew away just before scrambled aircraft arrived (**FT229:26**).

Hours after that unprecedented sequence of events the Soviet Union sent the first lifeform from Earth into space: Laika the dog aboard Sputnik 2. We had entered the space age at the very moment UFOs shifted their mode of appearance in these dramatic ways.

In 2017, nothing remotely this intriguing seems to be occurring in the moribund UFO world. Yet, it must be said, we only see the true nature of those 1957 events in retrospect. At the time, they were largely missed by the UFO community, and only later investigations allow us to reassess them today. This underlines our need for better co-ordination, because in the world of 2017 there are far fewer people investigating the phenomenon than when UFO groups existed in every major town or city. One also wonders whether the ephemeral nature of the Internet will assist historians in 2077 quite as much as the permanence afforded by hundreds of editions of *Fortean Times*.

Today, even the MoD and the USAF – in 1957 each recording countless sightings each year – have shut up shop and lost all interest. So, it is not clear if we see a true picture of things as they stand now in the way we perhaps can for 1957, when we had to work hard and document everything. Will today's love of living in the social media moment leave a similar database of ongoing activity to help seek significant patterns in the way we've been able to with older data?

Things have changed in other ways too, partly because thinking about the origin of UFOs was simplistic in 1957, as is apparent from those reports mentioned above. The interpretation of the time – that UFOs were visiting aliens from outer space – was exciting and futuristic as we aimed for the stars. So, when the events of November 1957 were first recorded, aliens were assumed to be reacting to human activity, fearful of us being able to export nuclear weapons off-planet following our first baby



ABOVE: Windscale nuclear reactor in 1958; an oddly bucolic scene complete with grazing cows. LEFT: Laika's historic sacrifice commemorated on a packet of Russian fags.



steps into the Universe. It was an idea already part of the zeitgeist thanks to the 1951 movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, which fictionally presaged even the Texas car-stop incidents.

Looking back from a few decades later we have a broader range of ideas that were only just starting to ferment in Europe in the late 1950s. These would allow us to view things from a fortean perspective and see the UFO event not just as a literal reality but also one with an observable human dimension. Carl Jung would soon write about UFOs from their mythic and cultural perspective and how this might be crucial to understanding them, regardless of any physical reality that might underlie individual sightings.

In 2017, we have the option of blending such new and old concepts to ask whether something like the collective unconscious of our planet was causing what we then perceived as nuts-and-bolts UFOs and literal events. We can now identify that the massive Uranium leak at Sellafield happened just days after Earth's first rocket into space (Sputnik 1, on 4 October) and a month before Laika flew as the first 'astronaut' in Sputnik 2. That pattern, blending space and nuclear catastrophe, was an extraordinarily

powerful one on the public imagination.

Last month (**FT361:29**) I described how the media can influence what we believe about UFOs. It creates a phenomenon within a phenomenon. A 'soft' reality is moulded out of the 'hard' reality of sightings as they get adapted by reporting and enter public consciousness.

So perhaps rather than aliens displaying their superiority and issuing a warning in November 1957, something else was spreading unseen beneath that major wave. Maybe it was a cry from our global consciousness, manifesting as a waking dream on a planetary scale; perhaps the UFOs were being employed symbolically, rather as we find meaningful motifs within our individual dreams. Was it designed to make us sit up and take note and plead with ourselves to do something about the nightmare facing society as revealed in then-current events?

The imagery of 1950s UFO cases is full of messages from spacemen about our future as a planet as seen from the perspective of the rest of the cosmos. It was as if we were sensing, but also absolving ourselves of, our own part in the new risks technology posed to our future by displacing it onto UFOs and aliens. Ever since 1957 we seem to have been waiting for the intergalactic cavalry to come and save us. Are UFOs and aliens just the space-age version of an all-powerful figure like Superman?

From today's perspective, it looks as though 1957 saw us, perhaps unconsciously, reacting to the Earth-shattering events and technological traumas of the age by turning our fears into a plea to the no doubt equally worried aliens to help us get our act together.

But perhaps the aliens were us, and we were simply talking to ourselves.

# Introducing the Fairy Census 2014-2017

Do people still see fairies in the modern world? And, if so, how do they make sense of an ‘impossible’ experience? **SIMON YOUNG** introduces the Fairy Census and presents a selection of entries from this survey of contemporary encounters with the Little People.

In December 2014 I launched, in *Fortean Times*, the Fairy Census: an online survey of people who had had fairy experiences (see FT321:25). The Census has led to many good things. In December 2017, Gibson Square brought out *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies 500 AD to the Present*, with three bonus chapters on emigrant fairies in North America. *Magical Folk* is the first major study of British and Irish fairies in almost half a century and includes data from the Census. I will shortly release the experiences I received free and anonymously online as a single 160,000-word pdf publication: *The Fairy Census, 2014-2017*. My hope is that this will kick off a new phase of collection and that in 2020 or thereabouts I’ll be able to come back with more.

I am by no means the first person to attempt a fairy study of this type. In the background were two particularly important surveys that served as inspirations. First, there was Walter Evans Wentz’s *Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911). Evans Wentz, a bohemian American with a gift for making friends and money, spent several months in 1907, 1908, and 1909 scouring rural communities in Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, Man, Scotland and Wales for fairy experiences and fairy folklore. The second was Marjorie Johnson’s *Seeing Fairies*, completed in 1996, but only published in English in 2014 by Anomalist Books. Marjorie collected fairy experiences from the 1930s through to the 1990s and, with loving care, ran these together into a single tome (see FT321:30-37, 38-45).

What did I want to achieve and what did I actually achieve by collecting these fragments of the ‘impossible’? For all



*What did I want to achieve by collecting these fragments of the ‘impossible’?*

my veneration of Evans Wentz and Johnson, there is an important difference between their works and the Fairy Census. Both Evans Wentz (who tried again and again to see fairies but failed) and Marjorie Johnson (who constantly saw fairies and sometimes did not want to) had a simple end game in view. They hoped to prove the existence of fairies to a doubting world, albeit in very different ways; how Evans Wentz got snooty old Oxford University Press to publish his *Fairy Faith* is an enduring mystery. My aim is much more modest. I want to understand not whether fairies exist, but what kind of people have fairy experiences and in what circumstances. I like this aim because there is a real chance of progress.

I had hoped to bring in 1,000 experiences. I didn’t make it. But I got, with the help of social media, various magazines, newspapers and radio stations, just over 500. These ranged from five words (the haiku-like: ‘tiny high-pitched bells and flutes’) to thousands of words, and were often extremely well written: three or four could stand as rather creepy short stories. The most effective help in fairy hunting, without any question, came from

*Fortean Times*: so, a huge thanks to all its readers. You brought in three times more responses than your nearest rival, Radio New Zealand, and about 10 times more than the *Daily Express*! The records came, above all, from the English-speaking world: 230 from Canada and the United States; 190 from Britain and Ireland; and 40 from Australia and New Zealand. Even the 40 or so records from the rest of the world have a salting of English-speaking tourists. The Census is somewhat provincial, then, but experiences are at least coming out of





ABOVE LEFT: A traveller lured off the beaten path by a Will-o'-the-Wisp in a painting by Arnold Böcklin. ABOVE RIGHT: A great many fairy encounters appear to take place when the witness is tired and on the edge of sleep or has just woken up, as in this painting by John Anster Fitzgerald.

similar Anglophone cultures, which should be useful for purposes of comparison.

#### EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTERS

Well actually, even within the narrow band of the English-speaking world, definitions of 'fairy' have changed enormously over the last century; or perhaps it would be truer to say that they have fragmented. There is, for example, a long tradition of fairies carrying lights, dating back at least to the early modern period. But, today, many people quite routinely interpret what forteans call 'earth lights', and what our ancestors would have referred to, instead, as Will-o'-the-Wisp (or some equivalent term), as fairies. I suspect that this has been helped along by digital photography and the fairy 'orbs' seen as a result. Another big change in fairy iconography is the appearance of wings. When Evans Wentz looked at fairies in 1907-1909 he did not record a single example of a fairy with wings. Marjorie Johnson – post Cottingley, where wings had featured in each of the five photographs (see FT356:30-35) – gathered a few winged fairies between the 1930s and the 1990s. In the Fairy Census, perhaps half of *seen* fairies have wings: in one case fairy wings are even recorded for Ireland.

There were also many miscellaneous 'weird' experiences where the person responding to the questionnaire *suspected* that he or she had seen a fairy, sometimes stating this very tentatively, and often only after explaining why this could not be a ghost, alien or angel. There is sometimes, I think, the sense of: 'what else could it be?' So, for instance, you see a miniature luminous cat by the side of the road: fairy!

*"He really did look like a little Santa Claus, except for the red skin, horns and tail..."*

You see little wolf men while you are trying to get to sleep: fairies! What is interesting here is that, 500 years ago, this kind of 'manifestation' would have been seen as a ghost or a demon. But modern ghosts are much more limited in their range and demons have all but vanished, save among fringe Evangelicals. It is often said that modern fairies are kind. I am tempted to think that, rather, 'kind' things are classed as fairies. But even that doesn't stand up. For example, the wolf men described above were clearly a nightmarish memory for a man recalling childhood encounters.

Whatever fairies looked like, the encounters were, as can be imagined, extraordinary, bewildering and sometimes disturbing. There was the man who swatted a fairy dead in a supermarket queue in Scotland. The young woman in Massachusetts who had a group of fairies "groped my boob". The child playing in the Amazon rain forest who pulled her sister's hair only to find that her 'sister', when she turned, had an old man's face. The

lemon-headed fairy who came out in the night to examine a petrified young man in his bed. The swimmer who spotted a leprechaun walking across the bottom of a swimming pool. The Midwestern girl who encountered a rabbit with trousers on. The multi-coloured fairy ponies on an island in a river in Yorkshire. The mud man and dryads who joined in a midnight dance at a music festival in the south of England...

#### 'REGULARS' AND 'NEVERS'

But if the experiences were extraordinary so were the ways that people processed them; the Fairy Census encouraged those who replied to give their own views on the experience. I pinned several of the more striking sentences I had collected over my desk as a kind of mental trampoline: when I was low on energy I would read them to bring me back up. "He really did look like a little Santa Claus, except for the red skin, horns and tail." "I think that fairies are something more in the middle – like a Baudrillardian-type post-modern fairy." "I do not condone this method for seeing faeries because it is highly addictive and more dangerous than methamphetamines." "Fairies probably do not exist," from a young Australian woman who had had several fairy experiences after a head trauma. Or, my personal favourite, the American who was so terrified at seeing a fairy that she ran to her car screaming: "We have to get into technology and drive away."

So, did my attempt to examine those who'd had the fairy experience pay off? The truth is that I don't yet know. I asked 40 questions to try and pin respondents down. What is your religion? Do you suffer

from sight or hearing conditions? How many books have you read about fairies? Do you often lose track of time? I have simply not, so far, been able, to get my head around this mass of additional data. It will take another year to make sense of it. But a few things can quickly be shredded. Educational attainments, for example, might be relevant for voting intentions or income: but they seem to have very little to do with whether or not you will come face-to-face with the fey. University professors, researchers, and PhDs wrote in with their experiences – including, unexpectedly, two I know! Would a breakdown of humanities, social sciences and sciences for graduates have brought worthwhile results? Probably not.

The most interesting question for me has been the one about the frequency of supernatural experiences. Here three possibilities were offered: do you have regular supernatural experiences; occasional supernatural experiences; or have you had no (or hardly any) supernatural experiences? I have long had a suspicion that many fortean classics have actually been reported by ‘regulars’. This does not invalidate their accounts, of course, but it is context that we are usually lacking: investigators typically ask ‘what did you see’, not ‘how does this fit into your

psychic history’. It is very difficult to be empirical here but ‘regulars’ tend to have more baroque and surreal experiences, and also less scary ones. The grittiest and most frightening accounts come from ‘nevers’. A regular’s experiences can often be like straying into a curiously benign Salvador Dali pastoral. A never’s experience resembles, rather, a Norman Rockwell painting that has gone horribly wrong: boggarts grinning under the Thanksgiving table; leprous elf ears sticking out of jam jars.

There are also patterns in the circumstances of sightings. An interesting category, and one that I have previously signalled in *Fortean Times*, is the number of people driving or travelling in a car when they see ‘something’. Part of me thinks that, as we spend a great deal of our lives in cars, it is inevitable that some sightings will be associated with cars: another, and a louder part of me, thinks that, no, there is something significant here. One woman talked of seeing fairies when “I am relaxed but focused”: is that relevant for car fairies? By far the largest group, though, are the scores who were in bed, had just woken up, were just about to go to bed or who were exhausted when they saw or heard their fairy. This is particularly true of children

and adolescents. My favourite sub-category is children interacting with fairies in bed. These ‘children’ often recall their encounter 30 or 40 years later, insisting that it was not a dream: only two described obvious signs of sleep paralysis. Many talk of “a sense that the experience marked a turning point in your life”.

## TURNING POINTS

Something to emerge from the Census is how often encounters with fairies were viewed as being significant: a moment that changed things for ever. In fact, almost 25 per cent of those who saw fairies ticked a ‘turning point’ box on the questionnaire. Cases ranged from the woman who understood her childhood fairy encounter as marking the beginning of a psychic vocation, to the man, who, after a fairy encounter in Norfolk, wrote “I am a pragmatic scientist atheist (*or was*)” (my italics). This is something that comes through sightings of other forms of the supernatural or the otherworldly: UFOs, mysterious hominids in the wilds, ghosts... In some cases, it is just a question of an inconvenient fact slapping you hard in the face: reality is not as you thought. In other cases, it seems like a ‘shamanic’ awakening, with familiars butting their way into your life to show



ABOVE LEFT: Marjorie Johnson, whose decades-in-the-making collection of fairy encounters was finally published in 2014 as *Seeing Fairies*.

TOP RIGHT: Walter Evans Wentz. BOTTOM RIGHT: A first edition of Evan Wentz's 1911 *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*, the first modern survey of fairy lore.





ABOVE LEFT: A sudden encounter with the Otherworld in *A Glimpse of the Fairies* by Charles Hutton Lear.

you ‘the way’. There, for me, is the most humbling lesson from the data in the Fairy Census.

So, do fairies exist – or don’t they? Certainly, none of the points above need either validate or invalidate your view on that question. After all, let’s take as a given (which it should not be) that driving can induce a slight hypnotic state and driver X sees a fairy. Well, there are two ways to read this. The first is that the hypnotic state created X’s fairy. The second is that the hypnotic state ‘tore back the veil’ and showed X something that was always there but that X was normally too ‘mired in the material’ to see. The Fairy Census changes nothing in this regard and I doubt that any survey ever will, unless, just possibly, in some distant future, neurologists come up with PET scanners that can be injected into our scalps.

All we can realistically do for now is to shuffle closer and closer to an understanding of what these ‘lived dreams’ mean. When I began the survey, I had the prejudice that though I was only asking about fairies, all supernatural encounters were really, ultimately the same. That prejudice has now hardened. In fact, I’d throw mermaids, ET and Yeti in there, too. Many who filled out the survey clearly are not of this opinion, however: particularly ‘regulars’. They have many interesting things to say here.

As to the existence of fairies and other

things that go bump in our lives, I personally have only one certainty – namely, that all of this matters; both the fact of seeing ‘things’ and the vision itself. There have been several large-scale population-wide surveys of supernatural or psychic experiences over the past 120 years: unlike the Fairy Census these were not self-selecting. They suggest that between five and 25 per cent of citizens of industrialised western countries have notable supernatural or psychic experiences in their lives. In British terms that means that between three and fifteen million people see or live things that the rest of the population would rather not think about.

Imagine, now, that we were talking about an ethnic or sexual or social minority of these dimensions. Several king’s ransoms would be thrown, by the (doubtless reluctant) taxpayer, at university departments, at hoardings on the Underground and at think tanks. I am not advocating anything like this: in fact, spending money would be a bad idea for all kinds of reasons. But a little more respect for and curiosity about people who have seen ‘things’ would go a long way: in part, because respect and curiosity have rarely hurt anyone; in part, because there are perhaps wider lessons here about how we relate to hidden but important parts of ourselves.

Disagree with this or with some of the other sentiments above? One of the reasons

I have provided the basic Fairy Census data in an open format is so others can use the information gathered there to their own different ends. I’ve put the Census up at [www.fairyist.com/survey/](http://www.fairyist.com/survey/) and at <https://umbra.academia.edu/simonyoung>, where a Google or a Facebook account will get you access. I’m always interested to hear opinions on these matters: contact details are within the *Fairy Census* pdf.

If, on the other hand, you have an experience of your own to record, then please fill in the online questionnaire. Rest assured that your anonymity will be respected and if need be protected. There is also a parallel and, unfortunately, little used survey for second-hand experiences: e.g. a fairy meeting that your grandmother told you about 30 years ago. As long as you can read the English of the survey we at Fairy Census central can deal with responses in French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and, on good days, Dutch and German: perhaps next time we’ll break out of the Anglosphere! I’ll publish *Fairy Census II* when I get another 500 sightings in…

The Fairy Census questionnaire can be found at: [www.fairyist.com/survey](http://www.fairyist.com/survey)  
The Fairy Census can be found at: [www.fairyist.com/survey](http://www.fairyist.com/survey) and <https://umbra.academia.edu/simonyoung>

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# SOME ENTRIES FROM THE FAIRY CENSUS

## (#68) ENGLAND (LANCASHIRE)

*Female; 1950s; 0-10; on or near water; with several other people, some of whom shared my experience; 12pm-3pm; two to 10 minutes; aloof; occasional supernatural experiences; you had just woken up or were just about to go to sleep ['awakened from sleep, by experience']; loss of sense of time, profound silence before the experience, unusually vivid memories of the experience.*

"We were on the way to see our Gran, with my sister aged nine, and our Father. We went under railway arches, and turned into a long lonely lane, with a stream at both sides, the railway embankment on both sides. We had done this walk many times, especially our Dad, from childhood. We were walking along, and our Dad said, 'Wonder whose those kids are, out on their own'. We noticed straight away, their pale greenish skin and pure white hair, but I became alarmed when my Dad spoke to them. They didn't answer. Then he said 'Oh, they don't have knees, they seem to float in the reeds'. They didn't speak, smile, or acknowledge us in any way. My Dad, was a tough chap, but when I felt his hand really gripping mine, I knew he must have been uneasy. We walked on, and then looked back, no sign of them at all. Dad told our Aunt and Gran, they said there were no children by that description, living in the area. The odd thing is my sister doesn't remember, and my Dad wouldn't talk about it ever. While I never forgot it! Just what or who were they? The coalmines were very close by as well."

"Girl about six or seven, pale greenish skin, pure white short hair, longish clothes. Boy, or male about four or five, same skin and hair, similar clothes."

"Not sure [why I thought they were fairies]. I think it was my Father's reaction. It was something strange."

"[Fairies are] elemental



**"I turned and saw a figure, about three feet high, walking towards the car – he looked like a leprechaun"**

beings."

"I have always felt strongly at one with nature. Don't mind talking about it now I am older, as I feel more enlightened."

## (#96) ENGLAND (NORTH EAST)

*Female; 1980s; 21-30; on a country road; with one other person who shared my experience; 12am-3am; one to two minutes; inquisitive; occasional supernatural experiences; you were tired and hadn't slept for a long time; hair prickling or tingling before or during the experience, unusually vivid memories of the experience.*

"I was in a friend's car, driving back to Nottingham from Darlington, where we had been to see a band. We didn't have a map and got lost. We became so confused that at one point we found ourselves at the coast! It was around three in the morning and my

friend pulled into a lay-by on a lonely road to nap. He told me to wake him in 15 minutes. While he slept, I sat quietly, watching the clock but I had a strong feeling that we were being watched from behind the car. I thought I would turn around, see nothing and be reassured. I turned and saw a figure, about three feet high, walking towards the car, peering in. He looked a [little] like a leprechaun – he had a lined face and beard but he wore a black hooded cloak over a dark coloured jacket and trousers. I remember he wore a wide black belt and he was dragging a sack over his shoulder, which dragged along the ground. I saw him clearly. I can't remember if there was a street light in the lay-by or if the car lights were still on or if there was moonlight. I was so shocked, I turned back and woke my friend. I didn't say anything about what I'd seen, because I thought I

had imagined it, but when he woke, as he turned to put on his seat belt, he looked shocked and said, 'What's that?' Then he started the car and shot off down the road. I was so frightened that I just stared down at my hands in my lap. Maybe 100 yards down the road, my friend braked suddenly and cried out. I asked him what he had seen and he described the same hooded figure, and he had braked because he thought he saw another one in the road. He told me he had seen these creatures before near his home in Notts and they were always by the road and dragging sacks."

## (#142) IRELAND (CO. CAVAN)

*Male; 1980s; 11-20; on a country road; on my own; 9pm-12 pm; 10 minutes to an hour; mischievous; occasional supernatural experiences; 'just a normal walk home from a friend's house that I had done countless times'; hair prickling or tingling before or during the experience.*

"I was walking home one night when a rustle began in a hedgerow to my right. Being from the country, I put it down to a badger or fox out hunting. That thought soon fled when the rustling followed my every step. I increased my pace, so did my unseen friend's. I got really worried when, on encountering a gateway in the hedgerow, the rustling transferred to the other side of the road. By now I was petrified, but pig-headed enough to not show it. My companion followed me for another half-mile. Then came the part I will never forget: the hedgerow rose above the road to about my shoulder height. It became sparse, thin, more barbed wire than foliage. I turned my head sideways, and there, blotting out the stars, was a shape about three feet tall. It was bulky at the waist, wide at the shoulders. If it was looking at me, I could not tell, but it stood for a moment, as I did, before I ran the last

mile home. If it followed me, I cannot tell, for the blood was thrumming in my ears. When I reached my house, I collapsed in the door. My older brother was up, and he saw my state. He still says to this day that my hair was standing on end."

"Only a silhouette. Three feet tall. Stocky. Could not make out attire."

#### (#148) IRELAND (CO. DUBLIN)

*Male; 1990s; 21-30; in open land (fields etc); with one other person who shared my experience; 9 pm-12 am; one to two minutes; mischievous, angry, aloof; never or almost never has supernatural experiences; no special state reported; hair prickling or tingling before or during the experience, a sense that the experience was a display put on specially for you.*

"While travelling at night, on a road that ran up some mountains, we saw a shapeless white form that appeared to be a white shopping bag blowing around in the wind moving quickly up the mountainside. It was moving against the wind, however. Uphill. We had pulled off the road, at a lay-by, to look at the view of the city lights down below, when we noticed the shape jumping from tree to tree towards us. It was about two or three square feet in area, and a matt bluish white colour. Like a large pillow case or a shopping bag. No markings or features, not shiny at all, looked more like a strange cloth than a plastic. Both myself (American) and my fiancée (Irish) had a feeling that whatever it was, its intentions were not good. We had a general sense that something unpleasant would happen if it caught up to us, so we jumped back in the car and hightailed it out of there."

"Like an amorphous shape, vaguely rectangular."

"Size changed through the experience."

#### (#190) WALES (RHONDDA)

*Female; 2000s; 41-50; in a garden; on my own; 12pm-3pm; two to ten minutes; friendly; regular supernatural experiences; no special state*



**"The figure shimmered and had wings, but mostly it was transparent, like a rough sketch"**

*reported; profound silence before the experience, a sense that the experience was a display put on specially for you.*

"Early one afternoon in May, I was sitting out in my garden. The rhododendrons were in flower and it was a hot bright sunny day. I was very comfortable and content to listen to the birds and just relax. Unexpectedly I became aware of the golden outline of a figure down at the bottom of my garden. I say outline because it was not solid, but looked as though just its outline had been drawn with golden ink. The figure shimmered and had tall wings, but mostly it was transparent, like a rough sketch. It was about three feet tall and rose up in the air a little way before descending; it did this several times. Then I saw a second winged figure, very much smaller. This was also golden, but I remember seeing a flash of blue and green. My first thought was that it was a dragonfly, but on closer observation I saw that it flew quite differently and its shape

was not that of an insect but a small human-like figure. Next I became aware of someone on the seat beside me, although I could not see them, but they were trying to get my attention – I could even see something pressing on my left upper arm, moving my clothing. I had that strong impression that day that I was meant to see the fairies, and they were pleased about it. It was a lovely experience, totally benign; I was amazed to see how the fairies really did look the way they appear in traditional tales. I have seen fairies many, many times since that day. And May/June is a particularly good time for seeing them in my garden. I have photos of strange mists in that area of the garden from other years too."

#### (#344) US (NORTH CAROLINA)

*Female; 2010s; 31-40; on or near water; with one other person who did not share my experience; 3pm-6pm; two to 10 minutes; 'threatening'; occasional supernatural experiences; no special state reported; hair prickling or*

*tingling before or during the experience, a sudden chill before the experience.*

"I was on a rock in the river reading while my husband fished on up river. I was across from a park, people walking with kids and dogs. There were two young boys walking on the trail with their dad. They began moving down towards the water, when *it* [my italics] started coming up the river moving through the water towards them. It was pale-skinned, water-logged looking with black hair and sharp serrated teeth showing in a smile. It paid me no attention, but was focused on the boys. They were pointing at it with sticks and could absolutely see it. The dad finally ushered them away from the edge of the river seemingly unaware of it being feet from his kids. It watched them move up the trail away with a creepy look on its face and then moved on up river out of sight. Did not look friendly to me."

"I have seen them since childhood, different ones, and was told that's what they are. My granny from Ireland says I have the sight like her."

"I was always taught to never talk to them or let them know I see them."

#### (#339) US (NEW YORK STATE)

*Female; 1960s; 0-10; in a city, inside a private house; on my own; 9pm-12am; 10 minutes to an hour; friendly, erotic; occasional supernatural experiences; you had just woken up or were about to go to sleep ['sleeping']; loss of sense of time, profound silence before the experience, a sense that the experience was a display put on specially for you, unusually vivid memories of the experience, a sense that the experience marked a turning point in your life.*

"Not sure when it began as a child but I know it ended on my 10th birthday because I recall the disappointment. They came to me in my sleep, very often and the purpose was always the same. To take me to fly above the rooftops and treetops throughout

my neighbourhood as a very exciting treat. I thought for years it was just an odd recurring dream but the details of the things I saw from that bird's eye view would be impossible to have been a dream. In later years I was able to understand and recall more emotional details. I don't recall the first or last time they came but I know no actual words were spoken. They were fluid-like beings that were dressed in material that barely covered them and was white and thin and always flowing as they too never touched the ground although [they] had legs and feet. I went willingly and trusting as I knew it was under my control where I was to fly and when I was to return. I now feel there was an exchange that occurred. I feel they (as many as five or six) absorbed the excitement from me. Never draining, although I slept deeper and always briefly awoke at the point of being back in my bed. They oddly had no identifiable age but male/female was apparent and not concealed. Their clothing always appeared white, but sheer, and flowing always in movement. Their faces; some old but bodies looked young; some young faced with near adult features."

"They came to my house but never inside, rather to the window where they would wait for me. They had a way to let me know they were there."

**(#357) US (OREGON)**  
*Male; 1970s; 0-10; inside a private house; on my own; 6pm-9pm; 10 minutes to an hour; 'aloof at first then curious'; regular supernatural experiences; no special reported; profound silence before the experience, unusually vivid memories of the experience.*

"When I was about three years old I was at home with my family and we were watching the *Mighty Joe Young* movie on TV. I got a little over excited by it and got really loud and disruptive and [I] wouldn't listen when my parents told me to be quiet, so I was punished and sent to my room. When my parents put me in my room, they shut the lights off



## "As I approached the lemon tree I saw fairies. Under the lemon was a portal, like a wormhole"

and closed the door and told me to be quiet. While I was sitting there on my bed I saw a light appear in my closet and a caravan of small men and women that were only a couple inches tall began walking out of the closet in a single file line. They had little wagons and some of them were carrying lamps. They were dressed in green and brown and the men had little hats. I watched them crossing the room and head to the wall under my bed. I got freaked out by the little men and ran out of my room to tell my parents about them. They didn't believe me but I finally convinced them to come look. They checked my closet and my bed but didn't see anything so they got mad and told me to be quiet and quit lying and left the room."

"There were two types. Most of them looked like little men and women wearing brown and green. The men had brown pants and green jackets and little hats. The women had brown or green dresses and no hats. There were also a few flying fairies wearing brown outfits. The hair colour

was mostly brown or black. As soon as they were gone I started seeing the lights and the caravan again. I watched for a few minutes then ran to the door to tell my parents the little men were back. My dad came back and was really mad this time that I was kept [from] leaving my room and lying to try to get out of my punishment. He duct-taped my mouth shut as well as my hands and feet and tossed me on my bed. [!] Within a few seconds after he left the little people appeared again, but this time some of them climbed up on the bed to check me out. The men were accompanied by a couple of female flying fairies. I just lay there terrified while they were checking me out. They seemed really interested in my face and some of them were tugging at the tape over my mouth while others were playing with my eyelashes and hair. They didn't seem hostile, just curious. Still, I was scared and started crying and wishing they would go away. I finally closed my eyes so I wouldn't see them anymore. After a few minutes they left me alone. I finally

worked my way out of the duct tape and looked over the edge of the bed to see what the little men were doing and they were gone."

## **(#492) NEW ZEALAND**

*Male; 1970s; 0-10; in a garden; on my own; 6pm-9pm; less than a minute; friendly, mischievous, joyful; occasional supernatural experiences; no special state reported; profound silence before the experience, a sense that the experience was a display put on specially for you, unusually vivid memories of the experience, a sense that the experience marked a turning point in your life, a sudden warmth before the experience.*

"I was about four years old. Family had finished dinner. It was daylight saving, in New Zealand, and during summer. In my parents' garden was a lemon tree, adjacent to a path leading to an orchard at rear of house. As I approached the lemon tree I saw fairies. They saw me approaching. We looked at each other. Under the lemon was a 'portal', like a wormhole. The fairies looked at me, gave a smile and skipped into the wormhole. Their body language suggested to me they had been busted, and had not expected to be found by me and appeared embarrassed by it. I continued walking towards the lemon tree and then past it. When about five metres past the tree, I suddenly turned around, and again I saw the fairies. A second batch were escaping through the wormhole under the lemon tree. The wormhole was about the diameter of a soccer ball. The fairies were similar to [how they are] classically portrayed in pictures. The funny thing about the lemon tree was the grass that grew under it. When older I use to mow my parents' lawns. The grass under the lemon tree was always of very fine quality compared to the remainder in the garden. I suspect the reason for my encounter was due to the fairies doing a similar thing as I. They were enjoying a summers sunny evening. I never saw them again. I even returned the following evening to try and find them but didn't."

# Mr Wilson and the aeronauts of 1897

JEROME CLARK examines a cluster of mystery airship sightings from April 1897 in Texas and asks whether the mixed bag of witness accounts that have come down to us point to a series of real events, an elaborate fiction or something else: an ‘experience anomaly’

“It should be possible to believe one’s informants without believing their explanations,” folklorists Lizanne Henderson and Edward J Cowan insist in *Scottish Fairy Belief* (2001). In a dozen words they lay waste to centuries’ worth of fevered debate about experiences of the fantastic, arising from two irreconcilable extremes of interpretation: (1) extraordinary entities live in the world and are observable, and (2) they don’t and aren’t.

A modest refusal to commit to the sort of shaky certainty imbedded in traditions of either belief or disbelief is a seldom-seen phenomenon. Where controversies about fairies, monsters, divine messengers, abducting aliens, and the like are concerned, agnostics need not apply. Literalists and rejectionists – aka “proponents” and “sceptics”, “believers” and “debunkers” –

are trapped in thin-on-the-ground arguments whose purpose is to maintain their respective senses of the possible.

One side traffics in ideologically satisfying but question-begging pseudo-explanations that evince no more than a cartoonish cultural elitism, a lazy infantilisation of those others who only *believe*, unlike us who *know*. Even many literal-minded anomalists, who think of themselves as open-minded, are often confronted with reports too extreme to be incorporated into any imaginable model of reality. A fortean may be as driven to flee unthinkable possibility as the most nervous anomaly-phobe.

I know better than to hope to bridge the gap between such warring ideologies. Still, I wonder if a whole lot of futile exhalation of breath could be averted if all concerned were

to acknowledge that fantastic *experiences* are possible even if their nature and significance remain up for discussion.

It is foolish to argue that human perception is uniquely fallible when it comes to experiences of the anomalous – a claim both self-serving and tautological. We have no reason to discard such testimony only because it conjures up something out of the ordinary, given that such allegations are ubiquitous in history, common to human beings of all descriptions and shades of honesty, intelligence, and sanity. While perception has its limitations, we ought to be able to concede that (1) encounters at reasonably close range and in decent viewing conditions by persons of good character and eyesight probably “happened” and that (2) witnesses “saw” something unusual.

How a thing as counterintuitive as this might occur is far from straightforward, however. The process incorporates the imagination without – necessarily – rendering the extraordinary merely imaginary. Indeed, what I call experience anomalies transcend the simply unexplained (the province of event anomalies) to embody the inexplicable, a liminal realm in which ordinary boundaries – between truth and fantasy, the experienced and the imagined – fade.

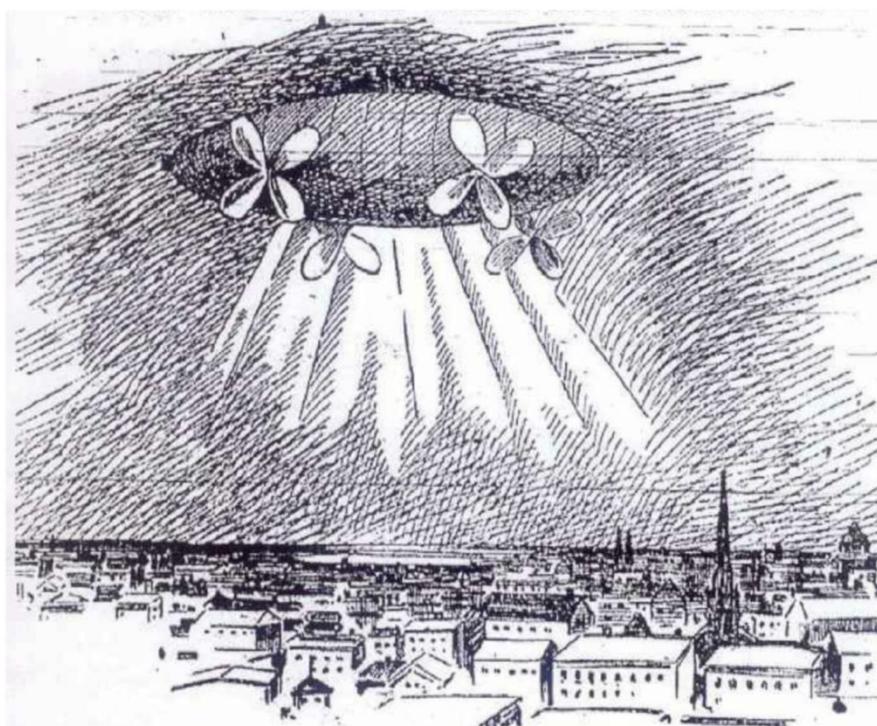
Consider, for example, Wilson.

## A LANDING IN BEAUMONT

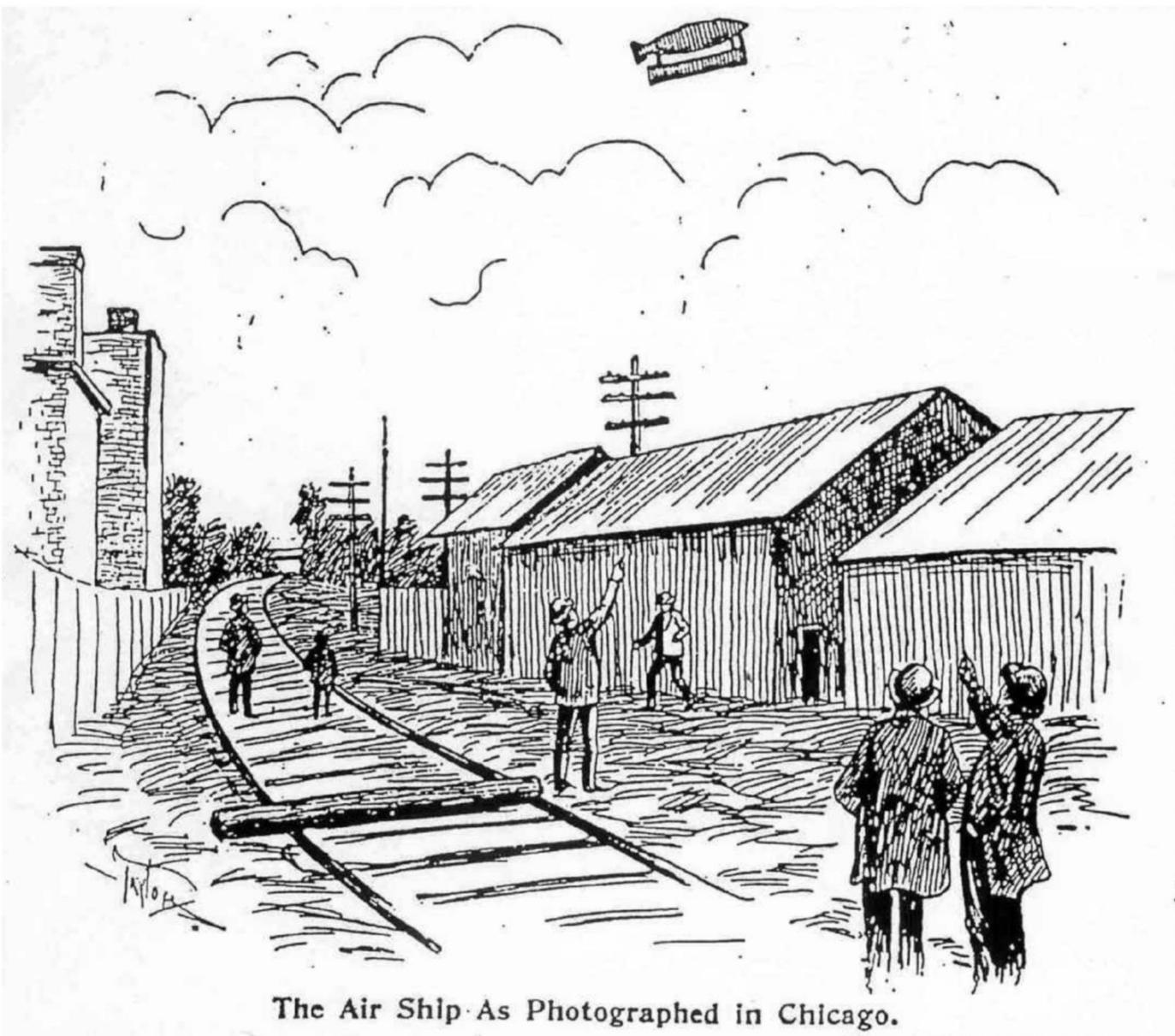
As JR Ligon (pronounced *lee-gawn*), employed by a local brewery, and his son Charley, a young man of around 22, returned to the family farm outside Beaumont, Texas, at 11pm on 19 April 1897, lights in an adjoining pasture caught their eyes. The lights were attached to a huge airship resting in a field a few hundred yards distant.

They had to have known what they were seeing. Stories about mysterious airships had crowded Texas newspapers all that month, along with rancorous debate about whether they were a popular delusion or the construction of a secretive inventor.

According to the *Houston Post* of 21 April (the sole known account), four men stood



ABOVE: The airship said to have flown over Sacramento, CA, from the *San Francisco Call*, 19 Nov 1897.



**The Air Ship As Photographed in Chicago.**

ABOVE: A drawing of the scene in Chicago when a mystery airship supposedly passed over the city on 11 April 1897. According to numerous papers in which it appeared, the drawing was an accurate representation of a photograph taken at the time by a Mr Walter McCann; the photo does not seem to have survived.

around the ship, which was perhaps 130ft (40m) long and 20ft (6m) wide, two great wings protruding from either side with propellers at the bow and stern.

When the aeronauts requested water, the witnesses took them to the house where each filled two buckets. From conversation the elder Ligon learned that one's name was Wilson. They had just returned from a flight over the nearby Gulf of Mexico, Wilson related, and he and his companions were heading back to Iowa, where they had built the ship.

JR accompanied the men on their return to the ship, and they were gone.

If the newspaper story is frustratingly short of detail, there is also the blunt reality that no such encounter could have taken place. While airships, also known as dirigibles (powered, rigid-structured but lighter-than-air balloons),

## *There was debate about whether the airships were a popular delusion*

were flying in Europe, in 1897 none were functioning in America, which would put these heavier-than-air structures in the sky before dirigibles were known.

Charles Fort, who revived this then-forgotten controversy in *New Lands* (1923), thought the airships might be evidence of "extra-mundane voyagers", but like everybody else who has tried to make sense

of the materials, he threw up his hands at the fabrications, exaggerations, strained explanations, and sketchy details. He expressed hope that someday somebody would be able to sort it all out.<sup>1</sup>

As Fort knew well, coverage of airships in 1897 papers tends to be inadequate or suspect. Hoaxes and pranks abound, and the landing stories are particularly doubt-provoking. If there were no inventors – maybe the one certain fact about the airships – how could anyone who conversed with one be anything but a liar or, worse, a fictitious character?

Well, JR Ligon is no figment of some fantasist's imagination. A Confederate Army veteran, we know he was buried on 18 April 1899, two years short of a day after his alleged meeting with the aeronauts.

He also shows up in press accounts in the

summer of 1897. For example, in the 20 June edition of the *Houston Post* we learn that on 3 July Ligon would participate in a Beaumont trade gala, with an airship-themed exhibition. "Not," the *Post* made clear, "the same flying machine that Mr Ligon saw but it will be a fair simile of that remarkable vessel and will be complete in every detail. At the grounds the ship will be placed on exhibition and no charge will be made for examination of the plans of construction or the method of operation." Subsequently, among the floats at a related parade on that day, the *Post* reported on 4 July, was "Ligon's airship, poised over 20 little girls singing National Airs."

Here the Ligon airship leaves the public record, nothing quite resolved except that JR Ligon was a real man and his unlikely meeting with aeronauts apparently remained in his thoughts.

#### **IMPROBABLY, AN IMPECCABLE WITNESS**

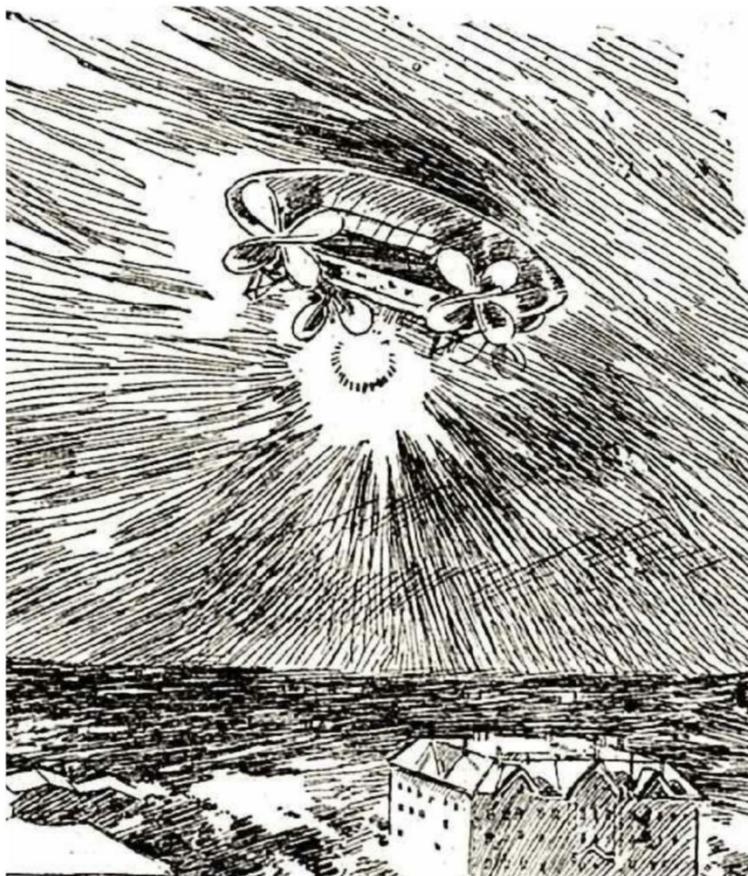
Later in the month of April

1897, Rabbi Aron Levy of Beaumont visited New Orleans, a city whose Jewish population he had once served, to attend the wedding of a niece. While there, in an interview with the local paper he spoke of a strange recent experience. The resulting article appeared on 25 April.

Levy related that one night, tipped off to an airship landing outside Beaumont, he sped to the site. On arriving he sighted the ship, which he described as having large wings. It was, he estimated, something like 150ft (46m) long. "I spoke to one of the [crew] men when he went into the farmer's house and [I] shook hands with him," Levy recalled. "Yes, he did say where it was built, but I can't remember the name of the place, or the name of the inventor. He said that they had been travelling a great deal... I was so dumbfounded that I could not frame an intelligent question to ask."

Though Ligon goes unmentioned, no other airship landing is said to have occurred at a farm near Beaumont then or, for that matter, ever. The rabbi has to have been an independent witness to the Ligon encounter. And if so, one could not have asked for a more credible one.

On 28 April, the *New York Times* editorialised: "If there is any confidence to be placed in the evidences of witnesses, whose trustworthiness on other subjects would not be doubted, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* has been interviewing Rabbi A Levy of Beaumont, Texas, and quotes him as declaring, with all the solemnity a ministerial position and unimpeachable character will



LEFT: The Sacramento airship pictured again in the *San Francisco Call* of 22 Nov 1897.

cases from April 1897, including one that reportedly took place also on the 19<sup>th</sup>, just 12 hours before Ligon's.

Unfortunately, the account did not appear in print until nearly a month later, on 16 May in the *Dallas News*. By then the supposed witness had perished in a flood in Mississippi (much of the state was under water in April and May.) We are told that the witness, George Dunlap, communicated his experience to his friend DH Tucker the day after it took place. The Dallas paper reprinted the letter's contents as provided by Tucker. No mention is made anywhere of the Ligon account, which could imply that nobody involved on the witness, letter-recipient, or editorial end was aware of it. Otherwise, Ligon's report could presumably have been cited as supporting evidence.

In any event, the encounter took place<sup>4</sup> in Lake Charles, not many miles directly east of Beaumont on the Louisiana side. Lake Charles is also just slightly north of the Gulf of Mexico, which Ligon's friend Wilson claimed he and his companions had lately overflowed.

Dunlap wrote that he had seen an airship approaching from half a mile away, letting loose with an "unearthly whistle" which so startled the man's horses that he was thrown from his buggy. As he struggled to get back on his feet, the ship landed, and its four occupants rushed over to check on his wellbeing.

In the ensuing exchange Dunlap learned that the ship's owner, also a crew member, was named Wilson, no first name recorded. His associates were Scott Warren, Mr Waters, and a "Mexican or Spaniard." The writer went on: "I learned that Mr Wilson (though I doubt if that is his correct name) formerly lived in Fort Worth, but I do not remember to have ever seen him." Wilson said that a number of airships had been built on Warren's property, location undisclosed, and added that one day they hoped to establish an airship passenger service.

Around 10pm on the 20<sup>th</sup>, one day after Ligon's experience (which would not be reported in print until the 21<sup>st</sup>), Wilson shows up in Uvalde, Texas, some 360 miles (580km) to the southwest of Beaumont. According to the *Galveston News* of 23 April, Sheriff HW Baylor heard voices, then detected lights in the alley behind his house. Investigation revealed a landed airship with large fin-like wings

## *Investigation revealed a landed airship with large fin-like wings*

give, that he has seen the sky boat close at hand and has conversed with its passengers."

As a revered local figure Levy was praised in east Texas newspapers during his tenure in Beaumont,<sup>2</sup> whose Temple Emanuel he served between 1895 and 1901. A profile in a locally published volume<sup>3</sup> relates that Levy, born in September 1848, was educated in Paris's Jermaine University, from which he graduated in 1865, before he entered rabbinical school. In the early 1870s he was sent to the United States, first to New Orleans, then to Morgan City, Louisiana, then moving on to Austin and elsewhere in Texas prior to his Beaumont assignment.

As with all airship-related matters, questions remain. We wish that more details were available from the witnesses, long gone. Yet the story does not end here.

### **WILSON'S GREETINGS**

Having established that at least one mystery-aeronaut encounter may have been true in some sense – like everyone else who has studied the subject I'd been deeply suspicious of such – I was led to reconsider comparable

wings and three crew members who stood outside it.

One introduced himself as Wilson, a native of Goshen, New York, and, 20 years earlier, a resident of Fort Worth. In his Fort Worth days Wilson claimed to have known former Zavala County Sheriff CC Akers. (Zavala County borders Uvalde County to the south.) When Baylor offered the information that Akers now worked as a customs officer in Eagle Pass, just southwest of Uvalde, Wilson asked Baylor to remember him to his old friend. Then Wilson and his crew drew water from Baylor's hydrant and flew off toward the north. County Clerk Henry Bowles, who lived north of Uvalde, saw the ship as it passed overhead.

The press account declares: "Mr Baylor is thoroughly reliable, and his statement is undoubtedly true. His description of the ship does not differ materially from that given by Mr JR Ligon of Beaumont."

Five days later, in a follow-up, the Galveston paper ran a statement from Akers, who confirmed that he had known Wilson, originally from New York State. Independently wealthy, Wilson had devoted his efforts to aviation, certain that one day he would astonish the world. Akers swore that Sheriff Baylor's every word could be believed.

A well-known figure in West Texas, Baylor was a hard-bitten frontier lawman with a long career documented in newspaper and other printed material from the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century. Akers, who served as sheriff of Zavala County between 1884 and 1894, took a job as customs inspector in Eagle Pass on 1 August 1894. In short, while neither was likely a saint, Baylor and Akers held responsible positions and had the good opinion of their fellows.

#### ON THE OTHER HAND....

When author Daniel Cohen, who lived in the area, sought evidence of a Wilson in Goshen, New York, in the appropriate mid-century time period, he came up empty.<sup>5</sup> More recently, when I surveyed relevant records for late 1870s Fort Worth, I found a number of male Wilsons but none who matched the profile of a well-to-do inventor.

Because I have never linked the airships to some American's clandestine creation, I do not regard the absence of evidence for Wilson's existence as fatal to encounter claims such as Baylor's. More to the point is this item from the *Weimar Mercury* (May 22):

*The following card from Sheriff Baylor of Uvalde county will be of interest to all of those credulous people who have believed the stories that have been published in many of the reputable papers concerning the presence of an airship in Texas... the Galveston News, the first paper to work the fake in this state, vouched for the veracity of Sheriff Baylor. Wearied of the many questions submitted to him through the mails and repentant of the hoax he had perpetrated on a credulous public, he now endeavors to correct the story.*

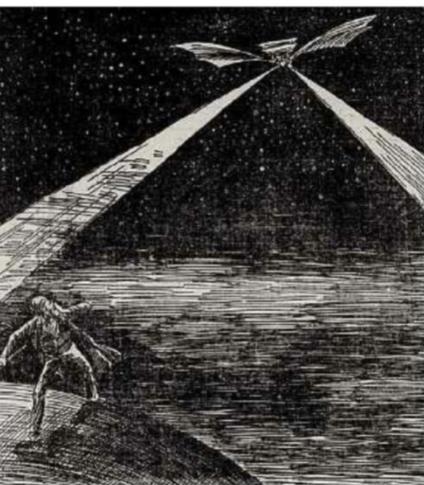
*"I have received letters and telegrams from every quarter of the globe asking what I know about airships. Now to set at rest every*

*question on this subject I wish to say that I never saw an airship, and patience has ceased to be a virtue. The reporter who perpetrated that yarn... and dragged my name through the press of the country as the originator of such a Munchhausen tale, was by orders shot this morning."<sup>6</sup>*

One could argue, I suppose, that Baylor falsely denied his airship encounter so that curiosity-seekers would cease pestering him. Even so, a postcard to an obscure provincial newspaper doesn't strike me as the most effective way to accomplish that.

#### WILSON AGAIN

In a letter published on 19 April in the *Dallas*



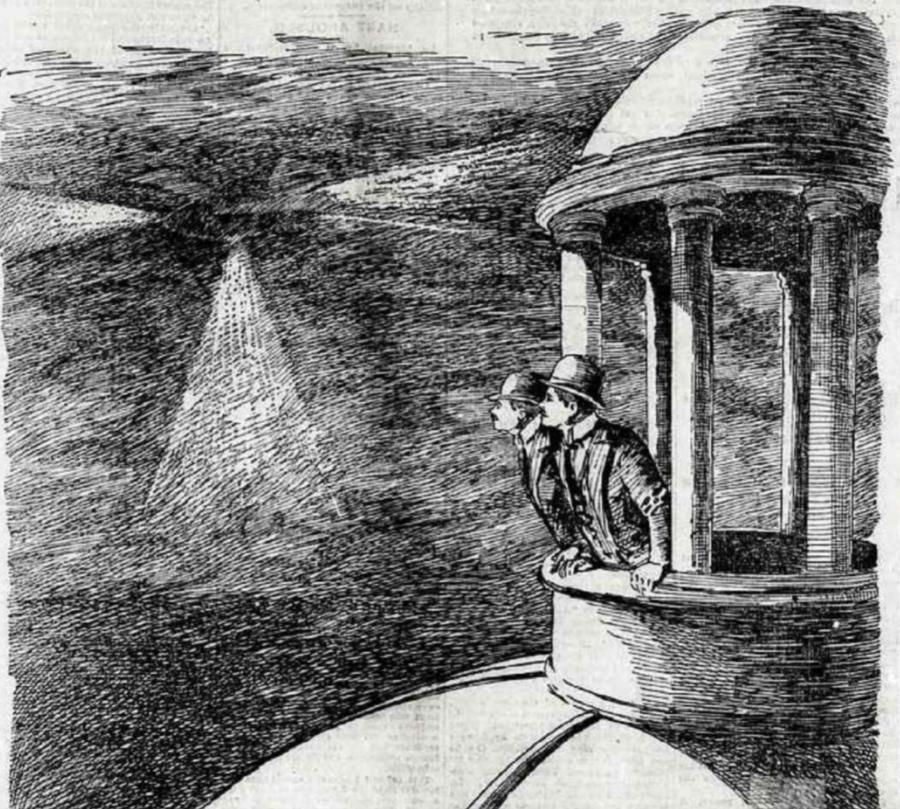
*News*, CG Williams of Greenville<sup>7</sup> asserted that he had encountered a landed airship. While taking a stroll two miles south of town, he encountered the ship from which three men emerged. One said the ship was the product of years of labour "at a little town in the interior of New York State."

At midnight on 22 April, according to the *Houston Post*, Frank Nichols, who lived two miles east of the tiny settlement of Josserand, 75 miles (120km) northwest of Beaumont, was awakened by a "whirring noise". Through a window he spotted a well-lighted airship resting in his corn field. Bolting out the door, he spied two bucket-bearing men. They requested permission to draw water from his well, in return for which they allowed him to board the vessel. One informed him this ship was among five constructed in an Iowa town. Soon a stock company would build more so that airship travel would be widely available within the next year.

One hundred and thirty miles (209km) north of Beaumont, around eight o'clock on the evening of 28 April, HC Legrone of Deadwood observed a fast-moving, multi-coloured light in the sky. It slowed, then stopped to hover before alighting on the ground. Legrone counted five crew members near the ship, two of them gripping rubber bags which they asked if they could fill with water. As they were doing so, according to Legrone's letter to the *Dallas* paper (30 April):

*They informed me that this was one of five ships that had been travelling the country over*

**Viewing the Mysterious Aerial Lights From the Dome of the State Capitol.**



**TOP:** Another mystery airship, this time from the *St Paul Globe*, 13 April 1897. **ABOVE:** Multiple witnesses were cited in the case of the three airships seen over Sacramento and the Bay Area in November 1896.

recently, and that this individual ship was the same one recently landed near Beaumont... They stated that these ships were put up in an interior town in Illinois. They were rather reticent about giving out information... since they had not yet secured everything by patent, but stated they would soon be secure in this, and expected to establish a factory in St. Louis at an early day and would at once enter into active competition with the railroad for passenger traffic.

I have been unable to learn anything about Frank Nichols, but HC Legrone's father Adam founded Deadwood in the 1830s. HC later built the mill that comprised Deadwood's economic lifeline, and he was the town's first postmaster. In those days the population stood at 50 or so. Today the unincorporated community, with much of its land still owned by the Legrone family, is approximately twice that. It lost its post office decades ago.

Here is one final Wilson story. Dated Eagle Pass, it was published in the *San Antonio Express*, based on information supplied by Sheriff RW Dowe:

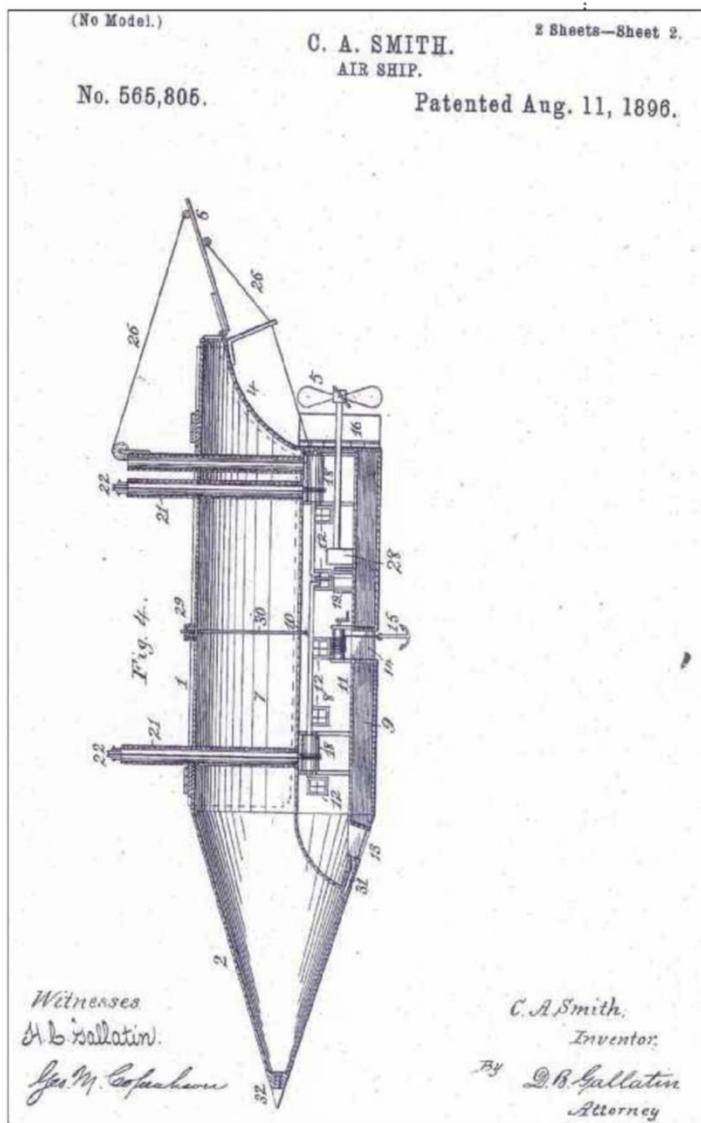
*Last night about 12 o'clock some Mexicans came running to my house and told me that a very strange thing of some kind had come down from above and stopped on the bank of the Rio Grande just below Fort Duncan. I went at once to the place and found an air ship and three men on board. They were just from Uvalde and claimed to have had an interview with Sheriff Baylor while there... The men are all well known in West Texas but do not care to have their identity known to the public just yet. One of the men inquired for Capt. CC Akers of this place, but was told Mr Akers was over the river counting some sheep that Mr Schrimpf is getting ready to ship to market. They filled their canteens with water from the Rio Grande and flew off. They invited me to accompany them, but district court being in session I could not accept.*

Either this story validates the one that Sheriff Baylor told and then withdrew, or more probably, it extends the joke.

#### **INVENTORS**

Between 11 August 11 1896 and 20 April 1897, two airship patents were filed in Washington. The first was claimed by CA Smith of San Francisco, the other by Henry Heintz of Elkton, South Dakota.

Nothing came of Smith's would-be creation.



On one occasion, however, I journeyed to Elkton – a tiny, pleasant community abutting the Minnesota border – where I learned that at some point Heintz brought his invention out for a test flight. An eyewitness recorded the results: “The inventor tried out the machine in front of the blacksmith shop and was the pilot. The machine actually got about eight feet [2.4m] or so, then plopped to the ground.”<sup>8</sup>

The *San Antonio Express* (26 April) avows, citing no source: “The inventors are Hiram Wilson, a native of New York, and CJ Walsh.” Zero evidence backs the assertion.

#### **REPORTS AND YARNS**

So, in sum, we have three instances in which Wilson's name shows up, and three in which his presence is implied. In two of them an aeronaut states that his is one of five ships built in an Iowa village; a third has five such ships constructed in the interior of Illinois, perhaps (arguably) through confusion of two distant, adjoining Midwestern states starting with the same letter. Two cite Fort Worth as a city connected with the inventor. One explicitly mentions the Beaumont incident.

Two refer to the aeronauts' plans to develop an airship passenger service intended to crisscross the country.

From this distance and with skeletal evidence, we can judge the strength of these links only provisionally. Perhaps, we can agree that the most believable is the Ligon encounter because we know something of Ligon's later history, which attests to continuing engagement with his experience. We also have the testimony of the eminently credible Rabbi Levy.

In my opinion, the candidate with the second strongest claim on our acceptance is HC Legrone. I say that because of who Legrone was: a community builder and solid citizen who may have had better things to do than to make up airship yarns. We know nothing of Frank Nichols of Josserand, but since nothing of his testimony raises special concern, we'll allow it for purposes of discussion. It is one of four accounts that have aeronauts collecting water. George Dunlap's report supposedly predates Ligon's by a few hours, though all we have of it is the letter reprinted in the *Dallas Morning News* weeks later.

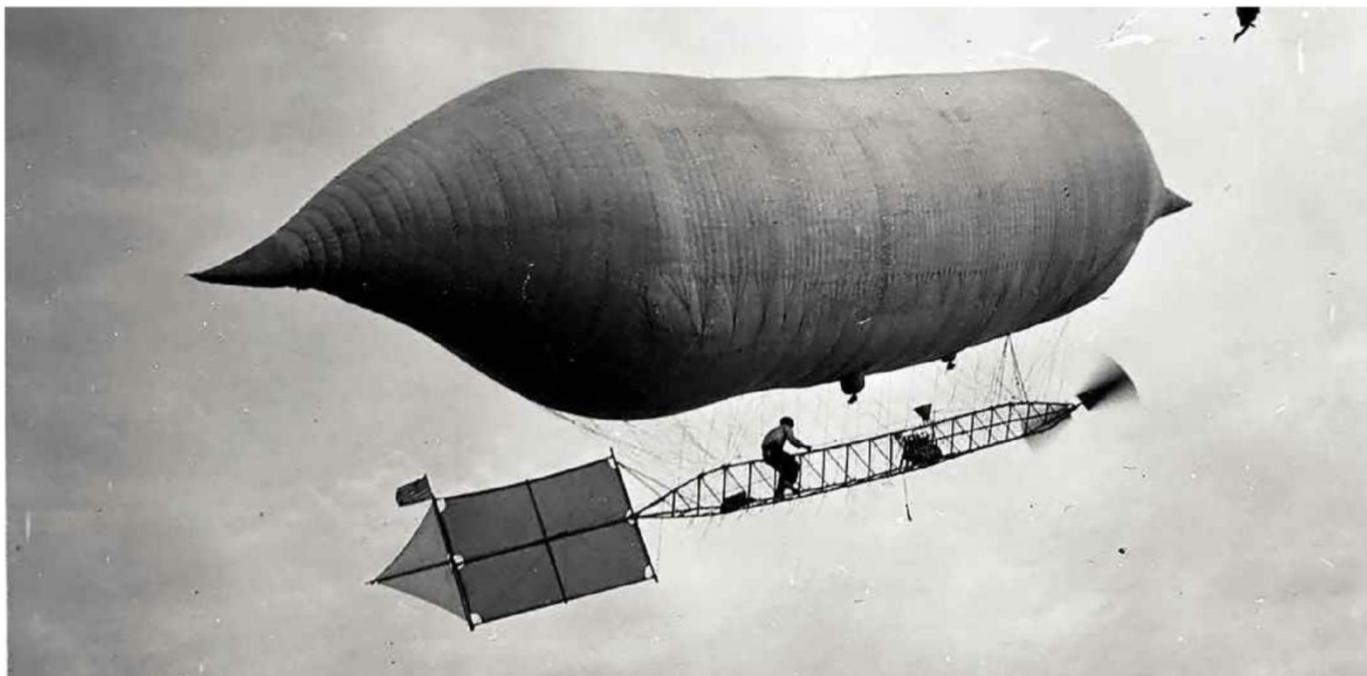
We may presume the least trustworthy reports to be those attached to Sheriffs Baylor and Dowe. If we take

Baylor's disavowal at face value (and I do), the others who supposedly provided confirming evidence, and who would have known each other, must have been participants in the hoax.

#### **THE QUASI-TRUTH**

So where are we? I submit that we have arrived in a region of crossed boundaries and blurred categories, into – in short – experience-anomaly territory. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Reverend Robert Kirk, the celebrated chronicler of Scottish fairies, noted that one is most likely to see elfin folk at twilight, he meant it literally. We can take it metaphorically as denoting that threshold in which the realm of the extraordinary passes from imagination into experience, where quasi-dreams come quasi-true.

If the mystery airships were not the physical aircraft of the coming 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were not entirely imaginary either. They were only partly imaginary. They sailed both sides of the borderline, between the merely conceived and the vividly experienced, in the fashion of all fantastic phenomena that



**FACING PAGE:** The patent filed in August 1896 by CA Smith of San Francisco. Another patent was filed by Henry Heintz of Elkton, South Dakota, in April 1897. **ABOVE:** Heintz's dream of powered flight never took off, but Charles Stroebel's airship flew successfully at the South Dakota State Fair a decade later in 1908.

escape the page or the screen or the tale, to appear before us in guises that lead us to think we recognise them while yet being blind to their inscrutable and elusive identity.

Wilson and his airship touched down here on the soil where crude yarns grow, there on the soil where the ship and its crew become observable and verifiable, even if by any prosaic understanding they could not have been there at all. Experience anomalies are indifferent to our narrow notion of truth narratives. They support false ones just as readily. One person's lie or idle speculation can be another's lived reality, albeit a temporary and illusory one.

Nothing in current knowledge explains how this happens. I don't pretend to have solved anything. I simply point to a process, a way of grasping how fantastic things at once happen and do not. At their most extreme manifestation, when we run into them in our conscious life, we take for granted, understandably, that they're there in the way we usually understand "there". Their true home, though, is not shared physical space but perception, memory, and testimony.

In 1897, sane and earnest persons, among them Ligon and Levy, experienced, anomalously, an airship and its crew, neither resident in this world but putting on a convincing impression of it. To others, airships and their crews never transcended the mirthfully imagined and the untruthfully related. Even so, they played a role in the circumstance that would render Wilson's ship observable and experienceable.

Things that can't be can be if we don't insist on them as events. They're pseudo-events, the fantastically imagined briefly taking

residence among us before fading away to reshape itself elsewhere in forms appropriate to time, place, culture. They have in common the vividness of the observed ordinary, and they are not hallucinations confined by definition to a single percipient. The perceptions, in fact, are often shared, which is what makes them so confounding.

Event anomalies are the merely unexplained, potentially verifiable via bodies, materials, capture, or other indisputable proofs. Unknown animals may well live and breathe outside zoology catalogues. Yet reports of them far removed from any plausible habitat – for instance, the hairy bipeds "seen" throughout North America – bespeak something inexplicable.

An experience anomaly, something like a collective dream that erupts into non-consensus reality, takes its form from an idea in the culture, whether it's somebody's fiction or a cultural supernatural tradition, or even a genuine event anomaly. In the last category we have the instance of ball lightning, which almost certainly exists, yet complicated by numerous reports of enigmatic balls of light which bear only a surface resemblance to ball lightning.

For forteans, unexplained entities, creatures, and occurrences should be the easy ones. They're solvable. As knowledge advances, it will contain them. As for the rest, the stuff of the highest strangeness, the truly inexplicable, we are fated to know nothing except that experience anomalies can indeed be experienced. At any unexpected moment they could appear before you. When they do, try to keep this in mind: You can believe your eyes, just not what they're seeing.

#### NOTES

**1** Early UFO author Donald Keyhoe tried to do just that in *The Flying Saucers Are Real* (1950). He treated the airships as UFOs in the modern sense, though these were not what witnesses described. Attempts to turn mystery airships into UFOs require a commitment to radically revisionist history.

**2** For example, "Rabbi Levy has won many friends during his stay in Beaumont" (*Galveston Daily News*, 30 Nov 1896).

**3** *The Advantages and Conditions of Beaumont and Port Arthur of Today* (1901).

**4** I here dispense with allegedly and supposedly for purposes of readability. I leave it to readers to supply the adverbs for themselves.

**5** *The Great Airship Mystery: A UFO of the 1890s* (1981), pp164-164: "I tried to trace the Goshen connection, but there is no record of an inventor or mechanic named Wilson... at the historical society or library."

**6** Perhaps we can take Sheriff Baylor's word for all save the last sentence while objecting that he has not quite "set at rest every question on this topic". Among the remaining questions: How did the hoax come about? Did Baylor conspire with the unnamed reporter? And what was CC Akers's role? And what of another public official, County Clerk Bowles? These questions, which never got asked, will never be answered.

**7** A man whose earthly existence I have been able to document down to his nickname "Tuffy".

**8** Quoted in Ruth Becken et al, *A History of Elkton* (privately published ca 2000), p94. I love that "actually". Apparently local sceptics took a dim view of Heintz's prospects.

• **JEROME CLARK** carries on about Trumpian weirdness and other baffling phenomena from his home in small-town Minnesota. A lifelong fortean, and a regular contributor to FT, he is author of the multivolume *UFO Encyclopedia* (1990-1998) among other books.

# Voodoo on trial

MIKE DASH looks back at an 1864 case that ended with the execution of eight Haitians for child murder and has helped define attitudes toward the nation and the religion ever since.

**I**t was a Saturday, market day in Port-au-Prince, and the chance to meet friends, gossip and shop had drawn large crowds to the Haitian capital. Sophisticated, French-educated members of the urban ruling class crammed into the market square beside illiterate farmers, a generation removed from slavery, who had walked in from the surrounding villages for a rare day out.

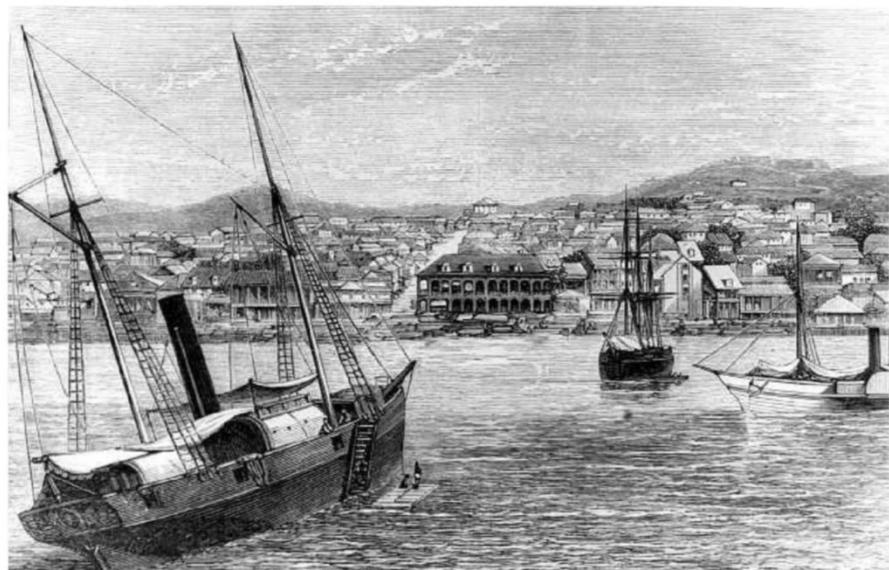
The whole of the country had assembled, and it was for this reason that Fabre Geffrard had chosen 13 February 1864 as the date for eight high-profile executions. Haiti's reformist president wished to make an example of these four men and four women, because they had been found guilty of a hideous crime – abducting, murdering and cannibalising a 12-year-old girl. And also because they represented everything Geffrard hoped to leave behind him as he moulded his country into a modern nation: the backwardness of its hinterlands, its African past and, above all, its folk religion.

Call that religion what you will – voodoo, vaudaux, vandaux, vodou (the last of these is generally preferred today) – Haiti's history had long been intertwined with it. It had arrived in slave ships centuries earlier and flourished in backwoods maroon villages and in plantations that Christian priests never visited. In 1791, it was generally believed, a secret vodou rite – the Bois Caiman Ceremony – had provided the spark for the violent uprising that liberated the country from its French masters: the single example of a successful slave rebellion in the history of the New World.

Outside Haiti, though, vodou was perceived as primitive and sanguinary. It was nothing but “West African superstition [and] serpent worship,” wrote the British traveller Hesketh Hesketh-Pritchard, who walked across the Haitian interior in 1899, and believers indulged in “their rites and their orgies with practical impunity”. For visiting Westerners of this sort, vodou’s popularity, in itself, was proof that the “black republic” could not claim to be civilised.

## L'AFFAIRE DE BIZOTON

It was hard to conceive of a case more likely to bring vodou, and Haiti, into greater disrepute than the murder that was being punished that Saturday in 1864. The killing had taken place in the village of Bizoton,



ABOVE: A view of Port-au-Prince in 1873.

*St John's account helped define Haiti as a place where ritual murder was commonplace*

just outside the gates of Port-au-Prince, and – at least according to the newspaper stories that fizzed over the world’s telegraph wires that spring – it was the work of a wastrel by the name of Congo Pelé, who had sacrificed his own niece in the hope of winning favour from the vodou gods.

Little is known for certain of the *affaire de Bizoton*. No trial transcripts survive, and the truth was long ago lost in a miasma of prejudice and misreporting. The most detailed account of the murder came from the pen of Sir Spenser St John, who was the British chargé d’affaires in Port-au-Prince at the time – and St John’s account helped define Haiti as a place where ritual murder and cannibalism were commonplace, and

usually went unpunished. The charge proved so influential that, as recently as 2010, the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that levelled much of the capital could still be blamed (by evangelical Christian Pat Robertson) on a supposed “pact with the devil” that the country had signed by turning to vodou.

For St John, who said he had “made the most careful inquiries” into the murder, the *affaire* seemed straightforward and hideous. Pelé, the diplomat reported, had been “a labourer, a gentleman’s servant [and] an idler” who had grown resentful at his poverty and was “anxious to improve his position without exertion on his part.” Since he was the brother of a noted vodou priestess, the solution appeared obvious. The gods and spirits could provide for him.

Sometime in December 1863, Jeanne Pelé agreed to help her brother. “It was settled between them,” St John wrote, “that about the new year some sacrifice should be offered to propitiate the serpent.” The only difficulty was the scale of Congo’s ambition. While “a more modest man would have been satisfied with a white cock or a white goat... on this solemn occasion it was thought better to offer a more important sacrifice”. Two vodou priests were consulted, and it was they who supposedly recommended that the Pelés offer up the “goat without horns” – that is, a human sacrifice.



ABOVE: A painting by Ulrick Jean-Pierre showing the Bois Caiman Ceremony, the vodou rite widely believed to have sparked the 1791 rebellion against the French.  
BELOW: President Fabre Geffrard, whose efforts to reform Haiti ended when he was accused of corruption and forced to flee the country by a violent coup.

Jeanne Pelé did not have to look far for a suitable victim. She chose her sister's child, a girl named Claircine, who St John says was 12 years old at the time. On 27 December 1863, Jeanne invited her sister to visit Port-au-Prince with her, and, in their absence, Congo Pelé and the two priests seized Claircine. They bound and gagged her and hid her beneath the altar of a nearby temple.

The girl stayed there for four full days and nights. Finally, St John says, after dark on New Year's Eve, an elaborate vodou ceremony was held. At its climax, Claircine was strangled, flayed, decapitated and dismembered. Her body was cooked, and her blood caught and kept in a jar.

Writing a quarter of a century later, the diplomat spared his readers none of the unpleasant details of the bloody feast that followed; perhaps he calculated that they would not wish to be spared. He also set out the evidence that had been assembled against the Pelés and their associates, together with details of other cases that proved, he thought, that the murder was not an isolated incident.

#### THE VODOU FAULTLINE

Before asking whether Claircine really was sacrificed to African gods – let alone whether cannibalism was a normal part of vodou – it may help to know a little more about the place that the religion held in old Haiti. Vodou was, to begin with, the faith of most Haitians. As late as 1860, the country was



only nominally Christian; the urban elite may have been more or less Catholic, but the mass of people in the countryside were not. Bible teachings posed awkward questions in a slaveholding society; thus, while the old French colony's hated "Negro Code" had made it compulsory to baptise new slaves within eight days of their arrival, most plantation owners made no real attempt to Christianise them.

Nor was it easy for any religion to take root in the brutal conditions in which most blacks worked. The climate, back-breaking labour and fever killed 10 per cent of Haiti's half-million-strong population every year and severely curtailed fertility. This meant, as Laurent Dubois notes, that fully two-thirds of the slaves in Haiti on the eve of the revolt of 1791 had been born in Africa. They brought with them their African religions, and scholars of vodou believe that its Catholic trappings were implanted not in Haiti, but in the coastal regions of the Congo, where local rulers converted to Christianity as early as the 15th century.

Matters scarcely improved after independence. Most Haitian rulers professed Christianity – they believed it important to identify with the free nations of the West. But they also insisted on a Haitian clergy, not to mention the right to appoint bishops. That the Catholic Church would not concede, with the result that in 1804 a schism occurred between Haiti and Rome.

Since there were then no more than three churches still standing amid the rubble of the revolution, and six priests in the entire country, little progress was made in converting the people of the interior in the years before this breach was healed with a concordat signed in 1860. The handful of clergymen who did serve in Haiti during these years were mostly renegades, Dubois writes: "debauched opportunists who got rich selling sacraments to gullible

Haitians." Vodou thrived in these conditions, and it was hardly surprising that when Geffrard's immediate predecessor, Faustin Soulouque, was nominated as president in 1847, Haiti found itself ruled by a former slave who was an open adherent of the African religion.

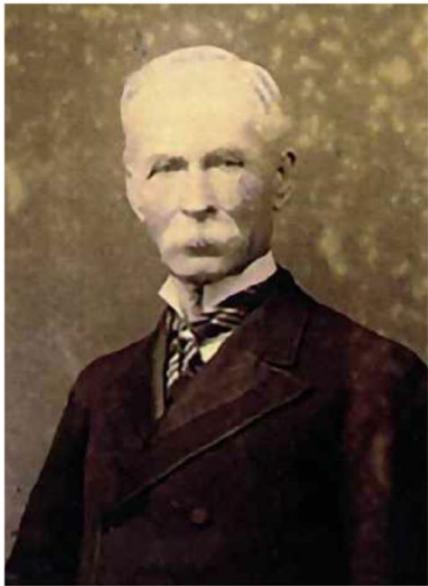
Knowing a little of the effects of the schism, and of Soulouque's dubious 12-year regime, makes it easier to understand why Fabre Geffrard was so anxious to prosecute the principals of the *affaire de Bizoton* – and to label Claircine's killers as vodouists. The concordat signed in March 1860 committed the president to making Catholicism Haiti's state religion – and the executions of February 1864, which so clearly demonstrated Christian "orthodoxy", took place just weeks before the priests of the first mission to the country arrived from Rome.

The trial was followed up, moreover, by a redrafting of Haiti's *Code Pénal*, which increased the fines levied for "sorcery" sevenfold and added that "all dances and other practices that... maintain the spirit of fetishism and superstition in the population will be considered spells and punished with the same penalties". Under Geffrard, attempts were also made to curb other customs likely to upset the pope: the public nudity that was still common in the interior, and a 99 per cent illegitimacy rate that was accompanied (Dubois says) by "bigamy, trigamy, all the way to septigamy".

Geffrard was equally anxious to distance himself from Soulouque, who in 1849 had made the country something of a laughing stock by crowning himself Emperor Faustin I. He was not the first Haitian emperor – that honour belongs to Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who had ruled as Jacques I between 1804 and 1806 – and although Murdo MacLeod argues that he was a shrewder ruler than most historians allow, he is usually portrayed as a buffoon. Lazy and poorly educated, Soulouque, it was widely believed, had been hand-picked by Haiti's senate as the most malleable possible candidate for the presidency; unable to obtain a golden crown, he had been elevated to the throne wearing one made of cardboard.

Once in power, however, the new emperor derived (MacLeod says) significant "mystical prestige" from his association with vodou. Indeed, it was widely thought he was in thrall to it, and St John noted that: "during the reign of Soulouque, a priestess was arrested for having promoted a sacrifice too openly; when about to be conducted to prison, a foreign bystander remarked aloud that probably she would be shot. She laughed and said: 'If I were to beat the sacred drum, and march through the city, [there is] not one, from the Emperor downwards, but would humbly follow me.'"

What all this means, I think, is that vodou became a fault-line running through the very heart of Haitian society after 1804. For most citizens, and especially for the rural blacks who had borne the brunt both of slavery and the struggle for independence,



LEFT: Sir Spenser St John, British chargé d'affaires in Port-au-Prince. BELOW: President Faustin Soulouque, better known as Emperor Faustin I between 1849 and 1859.

to inflame other blacks with the desire for liberty. Geffrard was not the only Haitian leader to look for ways to prove that his was, instead, a nation much like the great powers – Christian, and governed by the rule of law.

### THE TRIAL AND ITS IMPACT

With all that borne in mind, let us return to the Haiti of 1864 and the *affaire de Bizoton*. There is no need to assume that Spenser St John was a wholly unreliable observer; his account of the legal proceedings that took place that year chimes well with contemporary press coverage. There are a few discrepancies (Claircine is stated in newspaper sources to have been seven or eight, not 12), but the journalists' accounts are, for the most part, more purple and more partial than the diplomat's.

What's most interesting about St John's account is his admission that the trial was open to criticism. His chief concern was the use of force to beat confessions out of suspects. "All the prisoners," the diplomat observed, "had at first refused to speak, thinking that the Vaudoux would protect them, and it required the frequent application of the club to drive this belief out of their heads." Later, hauled up before the judge, the prisoners "were bullied, cajoled, cross-questioned in order to force avowals, in fact to make them state in open court what they were said to have confessed in their preliminary examinations."

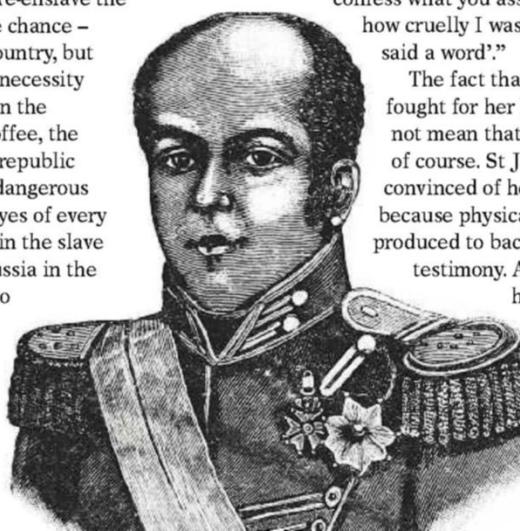
The beatings produced the evidence that Geffrard's government required, but also at least one disputed confession. It came from one Roseide Sumera, who had admitted to eating "the palms of the victim's hands as a favourite morsel", and whose evidence was vital to the prosecution. Sumera, St John recalled, had "entered into every particular of the whole affair, to the evident annoyance of the others, who tried in vain to keep her silent", and it was thanks to her testimony that "the guilt of the prisoners was thus fully established". Yet even St John had his doubts about Sumera's evidence: "I can never forget," the diplomat conceded, "the manner in which the youngest female prisoner turned to the public prosecutor and said, 'Yes, I did confess what you assert, but remember how cruelly I was beaten before I said a word!'"

The fact that Roseide Sumera fought for her life in court does not mean that she was innocent, of course. St John remained convinced of her guilt, not least because physical evidence was produced to back up witness testimony. A "freshly boiled" human skull had been found concealed in

## Vodou was alien and frightening to those who did not understand it

it became a potent symbol of old dignities and new freedoms: a religion that, as Dubois notes, helped "carve out a place where the enslaved could temporarily escape the order that saw them only as chattel property" during colonial times, and went on to "create communities of trust that stretched between the different plantations and into the towns". For the local elite, who tended to be of mixed race and were often French-educated, though, vodou was holding Haiti back. It was alien and frightening to those who did not understand it; it was associated with slave rebellion; and (after Soulouque's rise), it was also the faith of the most brutal and backward of the country's rulers.

These considerations combined to help make Haiti a pariah state throughout the 19th century. Dessalines and his successor, Henry Christophe – who had every reason to fear that the United States, France, Britain and Spain would overthrow their revolution and re-enslave the population, given the chance – tried to isolate the country, but even after economic necessity forced them to reopen the trade in sugar and coffee, the self-governing black republic of Haiti remained a dangerous abomination in the eyes of every white state involved in the slave trade. Like Soviet Russia in the 1920s, it was feared to be almost literally "infectious": liable





**ABOVE:** A veve, or drawing representing the Loa, at a Vodou ceremony in Port-au-Prince, 2010. **B BELOW:** A "sorcerers' passport," offering safe passage to vodou initiates, obtained by Albert Métraux during his anthropological field work in Haiti in the 1940s

bushes outside the temple where the ritual had apparently occurred, and the prosecutor also produced a pile of bones and two eyewitnesses who – it was claimed – had not participated in the murder. They were a young woman and a child, who had watched from an adjoining room through chinks in the wall.

The child's evidence was especially compelling. It was probably at least as important as Sumera's in securing convictions, not least because it appeared that she had been intended as a second victim. The girl had been found, according to St John's account, tied up under the same altar that had concealed Claircine; had Pelé not been stopped, he wrote, the intention was to sacrifice her on Twelfth Night (6 January), the most sacred date in the vodou calendar.

Even so, the child's statement was not complete: "She told her story in all its horrible details; but her nerves gave way so completely, that she had to be taken out of court, and could not be again produced to answer some questions the jury wished to ask."

As for the young woman who had, for obscure reasons, accompanied the girl to the ceremony, her testimony was at best equivocal. She confirmed that the feast had taken place, but according to at least one account, also confessed to eating leftovers from the cannibals' meal the next morning. The public prosecutor admitted to St John that "we have not thought proper to press the inquiry too closely" in this woman's case,



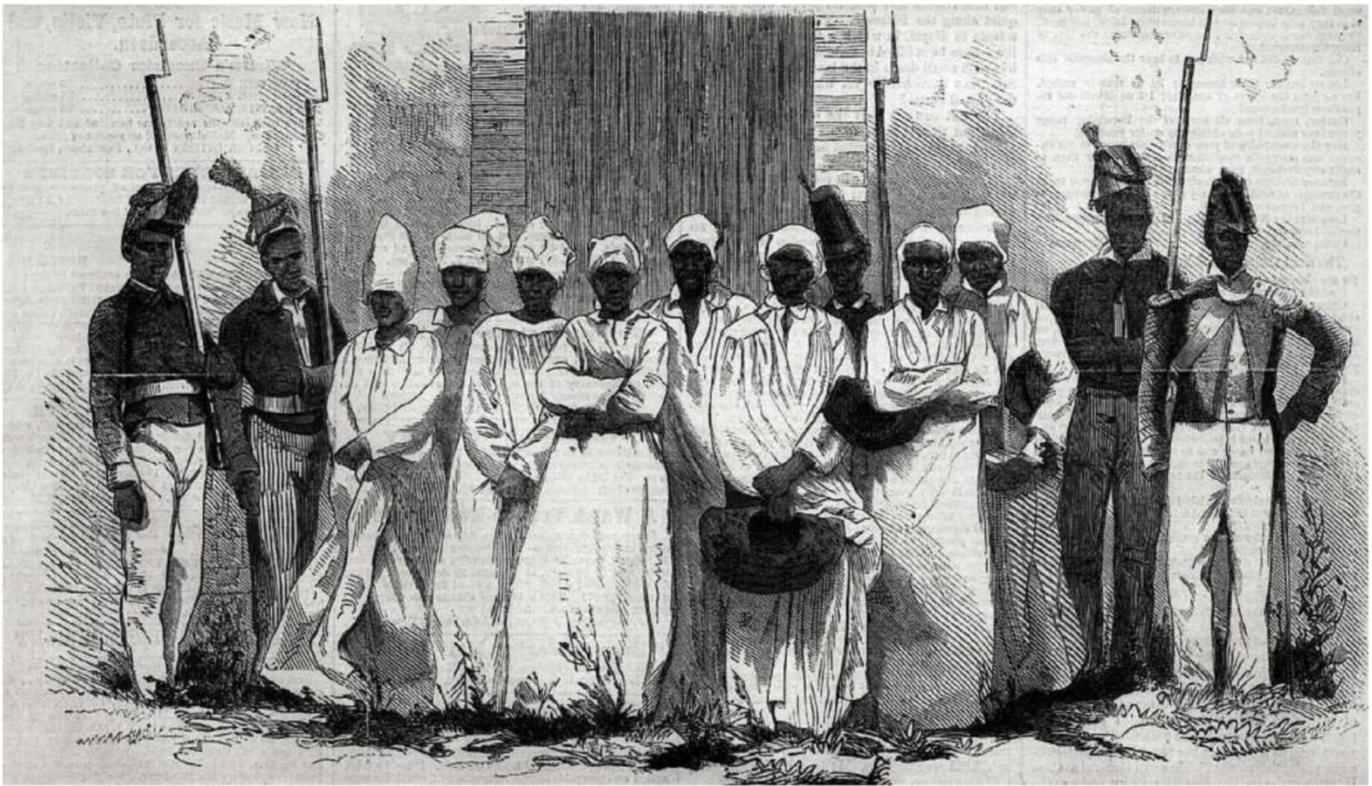
adding: "If full justice were done, there would be 50 on those benches instead of eight."

If much oral testimony was debatable, then, what of the physical evidence? That a human skull and several bones were produced in court seems undisputed; that they were Claircine's, though, seems less certain. And some accounts of the trial are curious in other ways. St John states that the other bones were "calcined" (burned) but still intact, whereas New Zealand's *Otago Witness* – in a typical example of the contemporary news coverage – reported that

they had been “reduced to ashes”.

As for the allegation, made by St John, that cannibalism was a normal feature of life in 19th century Haiti, the evidence here is thin in the extreme. Writing in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* in 1909, John T Driscoll charged – without providing details – that “authentic records are procurable of midnight meetings held in Hayti, as late as 1888, at which human beings, especially children, were killed and eaten at the secret feasts”. Close reading, though, shows that there are only two other “first-hand” accounts of vodou ceremonies involving cannibalism: one from a French priest during the 1870s, and the other from a white Dominican a decade later. Both are unsupported; both are suspect, not least for the claim that both supposed eyewitnesses claimed to have penetrated a secret religious ceremony undetected, wearing blackface.

Unfortunately, both were also widely disseminated. Added to St John's accounts, which included the charge that "people are killed and their flesh sold at the market" in Haiti, they profoundly influenced Victorian scribblers who had never visited the island. In 1891, observes Dubois, "one writer admitted that he had never actually seen a Vodou ritual, but he nevertheless described [one] in vivid detail – complete with practitioners "throwing themselves on the victims, tearing them apart with their teeth and avidly sucking the blood that boils from their veins". Each day, he wrote, 40 Haitians were eaten, and almost every citizen of the



ABOVE: An engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, probably made from a contemporary artist's sketch, shows the eight Haitian "voodoo" devotees found guilty in February 1864 of the murder and cannibalism of a 12-year-old child.

country had tasted human flesh."

This matters. Ramsey and Dubois, to name only two of the historians who see Claircine's case as central to Haiti's history, both argue that it helped to create perceptions that have lingered to the present day. The idea that Haiti was uncivilised and inherently unstable was used to justify an American military occupation that began in 1915 and lasted for 20 years; many even today remain convinced that the depressing aspects of the country's history were products of its innate "backwardness" and not, as scholars of Haiti argue, the real problems that the country faced during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Much, certainly, can be attributed to the crushing burden of debt imposed by France in 1825 as a condition of recognising independence. This indemnity, which amounted to 150 million francs (about \$3 billion today), plus interest, compensated slaveholders for their losses – so, as the Haitian writer Louis-Joseph Janvier furiously observed, his people had paid for their country three times over: in "tears and sweat," as captive labour; in blood, during the revolution, and then in cash, to the very men who had enslaved them. As late as 1914, Dubois notes, 80 per cent of the Haitian budget was swallowed up by interest payments on this debt.

All of which does make the executions of February 1864 a transforming moment in Haitian history – so much so that it was perhaps appropriate that they were botched. Wrote Spenser St John:

*The prisoners, tied in pairs, were placed in a line, and faced by five soldiers to each pair. They fired with such inaccuracy that only six fell wounded on the first discharge. It took these untrained men fully half an hour to complete their work... [and] the horror at the prisoners' crimes was almost turned into pity at witnessing their unnecessary sufferings... They were seen beckoning the soldiers to approach, and Roseide held the muzzle of a musket to her bosom and called on the man to fire.*

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MIKE DASH is an historian and longtime fortean researcher. His numerous books, including *Borderlands* (1997), *Batavia's Graveyard* (2002), *Satan's Circus* (2007) and *The First Family* (2009).

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# RUSSELL KIRK PART TWO: THE NEVER-ENDING TORY

In his second and final study of the American conservative thinker and writer of ghost stories Russell Kirk, **SD TUCKER** travels to Kirk's unquiet Michigan home to meet the dead souls acting as its spiritual cement.

Last month, we saw how Russell Kirk (1918–1994), the American conservative philosopher, self-styled "Bohemian Tory" and writer of ghost stories, was inspired by both a childhood encounter with spirits one snowy Christmas night, and by a time-slip during 1949, to develop his own unique political outlook on life. Further influenced by his reading of Anglo-Irish Tory philosopher Edmund Burke's highly conservative 1790 book *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Kirk set out to create a form of 'democracy of the dead', in which the past, present and future generations of mankind would be linked via a kind of imaginative abolition of time itself, unusual theories he placed into his textbooks and ghost stories in symbolic form. Kirk's most celebrated non-fiction book, 1953's *The Conservative Mind*, was an attempt to encourage policy-makers to pause for a moment from their frenzied building of a New Jerusalem, and enjoy communication across the centuries with great thinkers from the past. By reading their books, or about their ideas in *précis* in Kirk's own book, you effectively entered into occult communication with their spirits. "A truly humane man [or politician]," Kirk liked to say, "is a person who knows we were not born yesterday."<sup>1</sup> His book was a series of elegant potted biographies and summations of the thought of a number of men whose characters and philosophies Kirk admired, running (as some editions of the book had it) *From Burke to Eliot*. Eliot, of course, was the Anglo-American poet TS Eliot, a personal friend of Kirk's, whose works came to occupy a central position in his political and supernatural worldview.

Eliot's most famous work, his long 1922 poem *The Waste Land*, is a deliberately confusing and obscure representation of mankind living in a meaningless, grey, post-Christian world, in which all men are rootless and their actions pointless. In a parched and fragmented cultural landscape, people



LEFT: Russell Kirk at his typewriter.

## BOTH GHOSTS ARE DIFFERING ASPECTS OF HIS IMMORTAL SOUL

have, as Burke once predicted, become "disconnected into the dust and powder of individuality... dispersed to all the winds of heaven". It is a disturbing prospect; as Eliot has it: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust", this dust being fallen modern man. Shorn of tradition or purpose, broken links in the Great Chain of Being, such soulless modern zombies really did rise from out of dust, and back to mere dust they would return – no afterlife for them – a fearful prospect indeed. However, by the time of Eliot's even greater work of 1944, *Four*

*Quartets*, mankind's situation seems to have improved somewhat. An extremely complex and beautiful meditation upon the nature of time, the poem holds forth the possibility, through intense religious contemplation, of discovering the "point of intersection of the timeless with time", as Kirk himself had once done during his 1949 time-slip or when he had seen Christmas ghosts at his window. By wilfully ignoring our past, however, and becoming too caught up in current woes and fancies, Eliot warns that our modern society is in danger of being trapped forever in the eternal present: "A people without history/Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/Of timeless moments."

### TIMELESS TALES

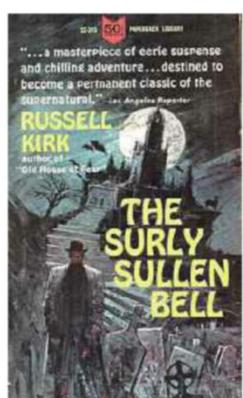
Kirk agreed. It is noticeable how many of his ghost stories feature souls caged within some kind of earthly, *Waste Land*-like purgatory; as spirits trapped within time, they are analogues of ourselves, or of how Kirk himself felt when attacking televisions (an occasional hobby of his, as we saw last time). Only by restoring the link between the generations once hymned by Edmund Burke is it possible for us to redeem ourselves from time; one of Kirk's more poignant ghost stories, 1984's *An Encounter by Mortstone Pond*, is a parable of this idea. In the tale, a small boy, wandering sadly by a pond after his parents' death, encounters a friendly unseen ghost who comforts him. Walking by the same pond as an adult many years later, the same person then encounters an invisible ghost-child in mourning and comforts him in his turn, using the same words which had been spoken to him by the unknown spirit during his own childhood experience. It is only once he has done so that the protagonist realises both ghosts are but differing aspects of his own immortal soul, and that through his act of thoughtful charity the nourishing Burkean

link between the generations has been restored at last. Significantly enough, the story begins and ends with lines from *Four Quartets*.

In a preface to the anthology in which this tale appeared, Kirk described his ghost stories as being “experiments in the moral imagination” and “instruments for the recovery of moral order”. Some of them were based upon actual experiences which he or his friends and family had undergone themselves, spun out into more coherent literary forms. After all, in reality most ghosts simply appear, seemingly at random, and carry within them no apparent explanatory narrative. It was the job of the Burkean ghost story writer like Kirk to “piece together into a pattern those hints and glimpses offered fragmentarily by mystical visions, second sight, hauntings, dreams [and] wondrous coincidences”.<sup>2</sup> This paralleled the way that the broken fragments of culture found in the lines of Eliot’s *Waste Land* – where snippets of Shakespeare mix uneasily with lines from music-hall songs and garbled conversations overheard in pubs – had become somewhat healed into a more coherent poetic whole by the time of *Four Quartets*. By lending narrative order to chance supernatural experiences in this way, Kirk suggested a method of redeeming these often history-less real-life ghosts from time by, as he put it, “finding a continuity to join them”,<sup>3</sup> thus helping mend the yawning gap which had arisen between the present and the past – a product of the disruptive modern ‘Enlightenment’ patterns of thinking which Kirk so despised.

## THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

This project had both its metaphorical and its more literal side, thanks to the fact that Kirk felt his spooky ancestral home of Piety Hill in the rural village of Mecosta, Michigan, was a gateway to another world. To say simply that Kirk’s home was haunted would be a gross understatement. Several generations of ancestral spirits kept Kirk company in the old house, given such names as ‘The Crying Baby’ and ‘The Man in the Checked Coat and High Collar’, assumed to be the shade of Kirk’s great-uncle Raymond, who had been murdered by a madman with a hammer some decades earlier.<sup>4</sup> This was not just some passing fancy of Kirk’s self-professed ‘Gothic mind’. Guests at Piety Hill often experienced ghostly phenomena for themselves, with one visiting academic being woken in the middle of the night by a spirit eerily whispering “Amos... Amos...” to her. Told of



ABOVE: TS Eliot was both a friend and an influence on Kirk's thinking about the importance of the past.  
BELOW: Kirk's 1962 book *The Surly Sullen Bell* contained “Ten Stories and Sketches, Uncanny or Uncomfortable”.

this event over breakfast the next morning, Kirk pointed up to a portrait of one of his ancestors hanging on the wall. “That’s just my uncle Amos,” he explained, blithely.<sup>5</sup>

Why was Kirk’s home so haunted? Kirk considered the area in which it lay, Mecosta County, to be a John Keel-style ‘Window Area’, where the boundary between the worlds was as thin as the notoriously poor soil. According to him, “the genius loci is malevolent” in Mecosta. His 1957 essay “Lost Lake”, named after the apparent epicentre of this evil, lays out the history of various macabre incidents from the region’s past, involving horrors such as frozen dead babies being given to children as makeshift dolls by irresponsible and sick-brained parents, toys which their equally twisted children then took out sledging through the winter snow. Kirk felt such abhorrent true-life crimes were ultimately the doing of local demons whispering the temptation to sin into people’s ears.<sup>6</sup> Much of his fiction is set in this region, redubbed ‘Potawattomie County’, where it becomes a ‘hauntological’ locale every bit as sinister as Point Pleasant and West Virginia were to Keel in his *Mothman Prophecies*. However, presumably because his own family had lived morally in Piety Hill ever since it had been built in 1878, Kirk began to think his house itself was a “place of power”, infused with the ability to repel the escape of further demons into the haunted land, and that he himself had inherited the role of ‘landscape guardian’ from his ancestors.<sup>7</sup> As

such, the benign ghosts lurking in his home reminded him of his responsibility to live up to their godly ideals, and to pass on such values to his own children, thus maintaining the Burkean link between the generations.

According to Kirk, “the dead alone give us energy”, and whatever energies he had, both imaginative and moral, “came from those beloved dead of Piety Hill”. Much of the knowledge he had acquired throughout his life, he declared, came “from the old books in that high-ceilinged house”, and, given his later public success, it was knowledge he did well to have absorbed. Not only the books, but even the inherited family furniture of the place was infused with the benevolent spirit of the past. His great-grandfather’s “splendid immense tall walnut bed”, apparently, had a haunted headboard upon which “the dead were heard to knock, now and again, over the decades”.<sup>8</sup> Kirk seemed to think Piety Hill was some kind of gigantic TC Lethbridge-style ‘Stone Tape’, writing of how “the continuity of family, building, and even furniture in my Mecosta house presumably favours the faithful survival of traces of a vanished consciousness, and reminds one of [the Spanish-American philosopher George] Santayana’s theory that emotion may embed itself in matter, to be detached long after by another consciousness under peculiar conditions of receptivity”.<sup>9</sup> Santayana’s most famous saying was that “Those who do not know their history are condemned to repeat it.” Kirk’s ancestors *did* know their history, though, and were highly respectful of it – so why were they currently trapped within time inside Piety Hill, like souls in an endless purgatory, or the dust-like moderns wandering through Eliot’s *Waste Land*?



## SECRETS OF THE STONES

Whatever the answer to this conundrum, Kirk made good use of the phenomena themselves whilst developing his own political philosophy. By not quite leaving the presence of the living, Kirk's ancestral spirits provided a visible confirmation of Edmund Burke's desired quality of social continuity. During the French Revolution so criticised by Burke, many grand old mansions belonging to the aristocracy were looted and vandalised as concrete symbols of the hated *ancien régime*. This was not a fate Burke desired to befall the stately homes of England, which he viewed not as symbols of unjustifiable aristocratic privilege, but as elegantly-built metaphorical Stone Tapes, preserving the spirit of the nation and its long history within their very bricks. What was wrong, asked Burke, with the owners of such magnificent buildings spending huge fortunes on them when such expenditure "takes its course through the accumulation of vast libraries, which are the history of the force and weakness of the human mind; through great collections of ancient records, medals and coins, which attest and explain laws and customs; through paintings and statues that, by imitating nature, seem to extend the limits of creation; [and] through grand monuments of the dead, which continue the regards and connections of life beyond the grave?"<sup>10</sup> If such ancestral houses were indeed pleasantly haunted by the past in this way, then what the fanatical Jacobins of Burke's day were doing to them over in France was some kind of politically motivated mass exorcism – and exorcisms were not something Kirk would have wished for his own family pile. "I have no desire to exorcise," he once wrote. "If shades tolerate me, I tolerate them."<sup>11</sup>



RICHARD HEATHCOTE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: St Andrews – a "living palimpsest" in which the patchwork traces of the past lived on in the present.  
FACING PAGE: Kirk outside the brick addition he had built at Piety Hill before the old house burned to the ground.

Kirk came to Britain as a graduate student in 1948, and it was here that the young American at last found "the metaphysical principle of continuity given visible reality. British society and the face of Britain were for me the expression... of Burke's principles of social immortality and of social reform: the past ever blending with the present, so that the fabric continually renews itself, like some great oak, being never either wholly old or wholly young."<sup>12</sup> The needlessly violent upheavals and iconoclasms of the French and Russian Revolutions, for Kirk, had unleashed genuine demons of violence and terror upon the world, for, whilst busy toppling statues and tearing down buildings, the Jacobins and Bolsheviks alike had thrown out much that was worthwhile in society alongside that which was corrupt and in need of reform, and replaced the old imperfect rulers and methods of government with far worse ones. The Tsar had no gulags, the Sun-King no guillotine.

## SCOTLAND THE GRAVE

Whilst studying in the ancient Scottish town of St Andrews, Kirk speculated that the many ghosts local legend said haunted its streets had been unleashed into the world through the evils of unnecessary social, religious and political upheaval. In the words of his recent biographer Bradley J Birzer, Kirk viewed St Andrews as a kind of "living palimpsest", in which visible traces of the place's pagan, Catholic and Protestant past lingered on in a patchwork quilt of architecture, place-names and customs. However, during the 16th century, thought Kirk, a tide of Jacobin-like barbarism had swept through the picturesque old town in the shape of the hardline Protestant reformer John Knox and his followers, who

had destroyed the old Catholic cathedral and pulled down monuments like crazed Reformation-era predecessors of ISIS, leaving the place a ruined shell. In breaking the stones of the past, Knox's men had inadvertently also broken the place's age-old Catholic Stone Tapes as well, releasing a cavalcade of "spectral priors... pickled cardinals, monks buried in dunghills... damned nuns and worse horrors" to roam St Andrews' streets. This, thought Kirk, warned us to resist the urge to simply smash up the past in the name of building a supposedly better future.<sup>13</sup>

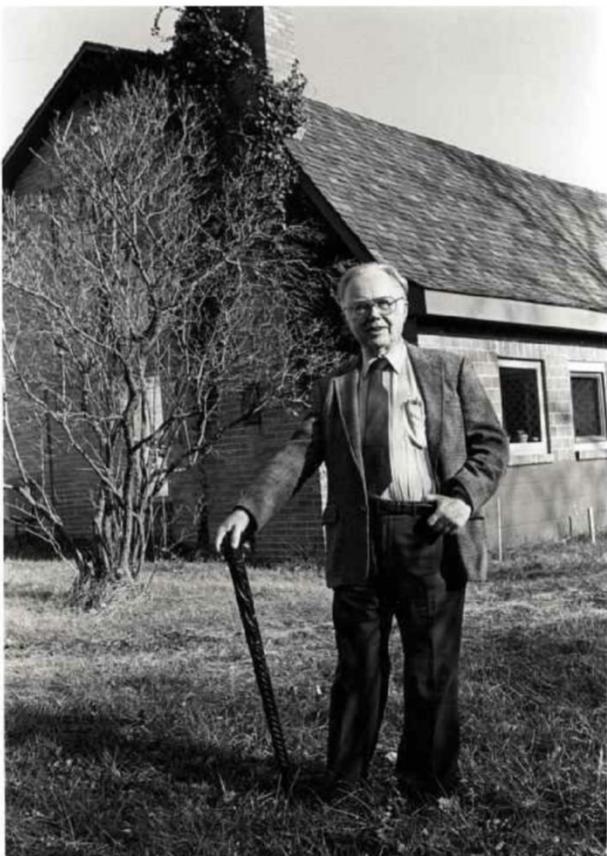
Not only destruction but also insensitive urban regeneration could have detrimental consequences for a town's ghosts, potentially banishing the good ones forever – and, for Kirk, a town without its ghosts quite simply had no soul. Decrying what he called in an essay-title *The Architecture of Servitude and Boredom*, Kirk's most directly tangible political successes perhaps came against big land-developers and city planners, whose distressingly utilitarian designs to pull down characterful (and potentially haunted) old neighbourhoods in favour of highway-building and the construction of supermarkets he helped defeat more than once.<sup>14</sup> Modern architecture, he felt, was not good for ghosts. On Hallowe'en night 1948, not long after arriving in St Andrews, Kirk made plans to keep a nocturnal vigil, seeking an apparition that was meant to haunt a particular archway he knew of, which, in the days before Knox, had been part of an old priory. However, he found to his annoyance that the spot had recently been fitted with a new streetlamp, which he theorised might put the phantom off appearing. "Modern lighting does spectres no good," he lamented in his diary. "We see them in our time seldom only because we have so altered the physical and moral atmosphere of man that he seldom sees his own soul, let alone someone else's. Who could see a ghost in an electrically-illuminated parlour of a flimsy new bungalow? To have ghosts, one must have a past for ghosts to emerge from; and one must believe in a spiritual world to recognise spirits."<sup>15</sup> However, despite Kirk's veneration of his own past, Kirk's elders were not to haunt his own ancestral home forever.

## ASHES TO ASHES

One of the most unexpected (living) inhabitants of Piety Hill was a wandering hobo and much-imprisoned petty-criminal named Clinton Wallace. Wallace later found himself immortalised in Kirk's Gothic fiction in the guise of one Frank Sarsfield, yet another spirit trapped within time. Wallace's main criminal speciality in real life was stealing money from poor-boxes in Catholic churches; he never touched those found in Protestant ones as, being Catholic himself, he believed such money to have been gained under false pretences. As this foible suggests, the physically hulking Wallace

was not quite right in the head but, being somewhat autistic, had the unexpected ability to quote large amounts of classic poetry on-tap, something the Kirk family found so appealing they invited him to move in with them.<sup>16</sup>

One of Wallace's household odd jobs at Piety Hill was tending the main fire throughout the cold winter nights. However, on the night of 10 February 1975, the hobo fell asleep during his duties, awakening sometime later to find the blaze had got out of control. The ancient chimney had crumbled under the heat of the unwatched fire, causing it to collapse; perhaps some old things should be replaced after all. As flames spread, the house and its haunted contents were quickly reduced to dust and cinders. "Where will the ghosts go now?" wailed the Kirks' neighbours, in distress. Apparently, they moved on to Eternity, their Stone Tapes destroyed. Some of those present claimed they could see a long line of ancestral spirits fleeing the house through its burning windows; other onlookers took photographs, which did apparently show "strange shapes and faces" passing amongst the flames. Piety Hill, much against Kirk's wishes, had been exorcised at last.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, Kirk had recently had a separate brick wing built at Piety Hill, and was able to move into this straight away with his wife and daughters – although the ghosts never followed them. As for the fire itself ... well, it almost seemed to have been fated. Familiar as he was with the works of CG Jung and Arthur Koestler, Kirk could hardly have failed to notice the various meaningful coincidences clustering around the event. For one thing, the house had burned to ashes upon Ash Wednesday, a Catholic holy day which the Roman convert Kirk had had much cause to ponder that particular year as, that



very same evening, he had been booked to give a college lecture upon his friend Eliot's poem *Ash Wednesday*. Years later, in 1994, suffering from heart trouble, it was upon Ash Wednesday that his doctor gave him the news that he had only a month or two left to live.<sup>18</sup>

The coincidence was certainly striking, and seemed somehow meaningful to him; were his ancestors trying to tell him something? If so, what? It was hard to tell, perhaps impossible. Upon the newly rebuilt Piety Hill, Kirk had a plaque erected, containing the following lines from Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "And what the dead had no speech for, when living/They can tell you,

being dead: the communication/ Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living." Maybe, once he had passed beyond the bounds of earthly time, as he did on 29 April 1994, Kirk would have understood the flame-tongued message of the immortal dead at last. Until then, the following lines, culled from an obituary he wrote for the old Piety Hill not long after it had burned down, represented his best guess: "There is an eternal contract that binds society together, Edmund Burke tells us: it joins the dead and the living and those yet to be born. When I too am dust [like Piety Hill] our children and our grandchildren may love the New House as we loved the Old; for what is new today will be venerable then, God willing. Ash Wednesday comes to us all, but after that comes Easter."<sup>19</sup>

And with Easter, of course, comes rebirth. In demonstrating to the young Kirk tangible proof of the idea that dead souls would indeed be capable of one day returning to life upon the Day of Resurrection, it seems that the ghosts of Christmas past he encountered at his window that auspicious snow-filled night during childhood were in a sense

simultaneously the ghosts of Christmas future – how could they be otherwise, for one who knew that past, present and future were but mere illusory outfoldings of the one immortal, timeless, transcendent Christian God? Unlike Eliot in his *Waste Land*, Kirk could show you not fear, but hope, in a handful of dust.

SD TUCKER writes regularly for FT, and is the author of several books, including *Space Oddities*, *Great British Eccentrics*, and the forthcoming *False Economies: The Strangest, Least Successful and Most Audacious Financial Follies, Plans and Crazes of All Time*.

## NOTES

General information about Kirk is taken from an excellent recent biography: Bradley J Birzer, *Russell Kirk: American Conservative*, University Press of Kentucky, 2015. Unreferenced general points about Kirk's ghosts and ghostly fiction are taken from Chapter 8: 'Ghosts in the Machine ... and the House' (pp.283-323) An edited version of this chapter is online at <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2015/06/russell-kirk-and-the-haunting-of-piety-hill.html>

**1** Bradley J Birzer, *Russell Kirk: American Conservative*, University Press of Kentucky, 2015, p18.

**2** Russell Kirk, 'A Cautionary Note on the Ghostly Tale' in George A Panichas (Ed.), *The Essential Russell Kirk*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2012, p241.

**3** [www.nationalreview.com/node/215817/print](http://www.nationalreview.com/node/215817/print).

**4** Birzer, p289.

**5** Birzer, p283.

**6** Birzer, pp292-3.

**7** Birzer, p387.

**8** Russell Kirk, 'An Old House Dies with Love and Honour'; 1975 *To the Point* column, online at [www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2013/04/russell-kirk-an-old-house-dies-with-love-and-honour.html](http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2013/04/russell-kirk-an-old-house-dies-with-love-and-honour.html)

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**9** Birzer, p289.

**10** Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford World's Classics, 1999, p162.

**11** Birzer, p289.

**12** Kirk, 'Confessions of a Gothic Mind' in Panichas, p302.

**13** Birzer, pp94-95.

**14** Russell Kirk, 'The Architecture of Servitude and Boredom' in Panichas, 2012, p331.

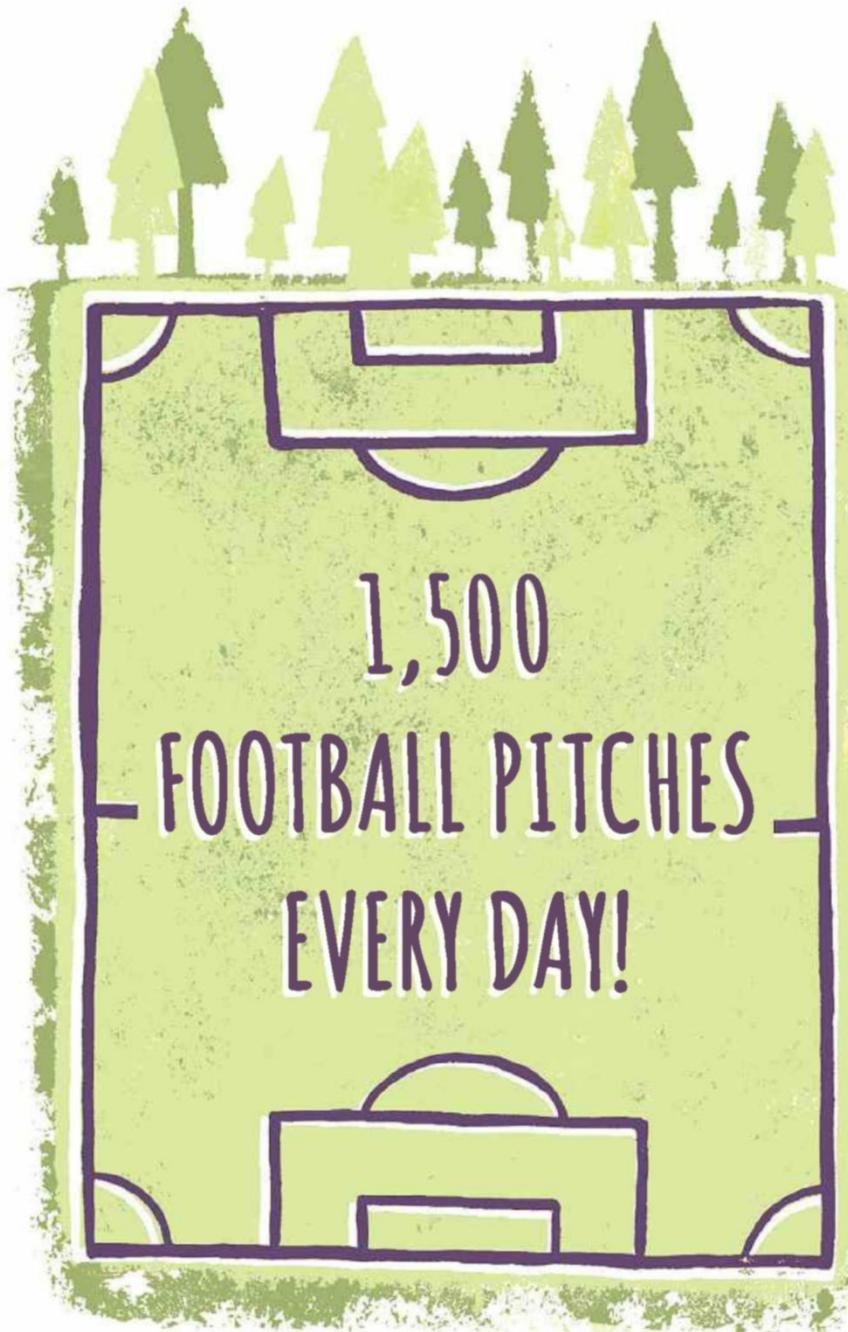
**15** Birzer, p288.

**16** Birzer, pp388-389.

**17** Birzer, pp289, 391.

**18** Birzer, pp391-392.; Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, when the Catholic priest would anoint worshippers with a handful of dust upon their foreheads, saying something like "Remember, man, that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return", whilst urging them to consider and repent their sins. A movable feast, it can fall anywhere between 4 Feb and 11 Mar, making these coincidences seem even more striking to Kirk. See Steve Roud, *The English Year*, Penguin, 2006, p66.

**19** Kirk, 'An Old House Dies with Love and Honour'.



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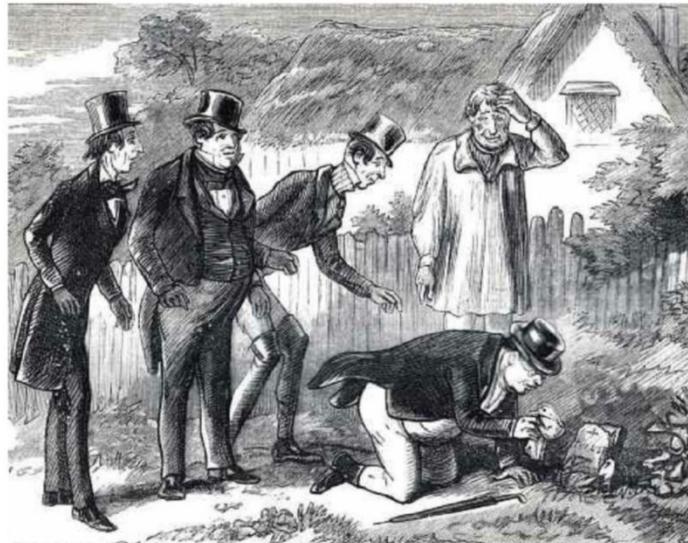
## Mr Pickwick's fortean parable

**ANDREW MAY** finds that Charles Dickens was well aware that mysteries, once debunked, have a tendency to turn up all over again...

Every now and then I spot an eyecatching meme or “breaking news” item on social media that I clearly remember seeing debunked – in FT, on the Snopes website or elsewhere – several years previously. “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story,” as Mark Twain never said (although the persistent assertion that he did is a perfect example of what I’m talking about).

The phenomenon is even commoner in the fortean world, where so many cases depend on anecdotal or single-source evidence that can be – and often has been – picked apart by careful investigation. Yet that never seems to stop such cases being recycled year after year in books, magazines, TV documentaries and online forums. Compared with more mundane “fake news” stories, there’s an additional factor in the fortean context (and I confess I’m as susceptible to it as anyone): most people want the “world’s great mysteries” to remain mysterious. Ultimately, debunkers are a destructive species, which is why no one likes them very much.

A few months ago, I came across a fictional episode that puts the situation in a nutshell. I could affect literary airs and say I was reading Dickens’s *The Pickwick Papers*, but actually what I was reading was a 1940s detective novel called *The Weight of the Evidence* by Michael Innes.<sup>1</sup> It’s a murder mystery – and a fiendishly complicated one – in which the victim, a professor of biochemistry, is done in by a



### *“Mr Pickwick’s eye fell on a small broken stone, partially buried”*

heavy meteorite dropped from the top of a tall tower. As the book is set in a university, several of the characters have a tendency to pretentiousness (to put it mildly), and the dialogue is full of abstruse historical, scientific and literary trivia. Among the latter, there are repeated references to an episode in *The Pickwick Papers* involving a mysterious rock (which may or may not have any bearing on the murder case – you’ll have to read Innes’s book).

I was sufficiently intrigued to track down the relevant scenes in the Project Gutenberg edition of *The Pickwick Papers*.<sup>2</sup> They can be found in Chapter 11 (“Involving another journey, and an antiquarian discovery”), which was originally published in the fourth instalment of the novel in June 1836. The discovery of the title took place on a visit to Cobham in Kent, when “Mr Pickwick’s eye fell upon

a small broken stone, partially buried in the ground, in front of a cottage door”. As a budding antiquarian, he was excited to observe a cryptic inscription on the rock, prompting him to knock on the cottage door to enquire about its provenance. Being told by the owner that “it was here long afore I was born,” Pickwick gladly handed over 10 shillings for it. A bargain, he thought: “He had attained one of the greatest objects of his ambition. In a county known to abound in the remains of the early ages; in a village in which there still existed some memorials of the olden time, he... had discovered a strange and curious inscription of unquestionable antiquity, which had wholly escaped the observation of the many learned men who had preceded him.”

After carefully transporting the mysterious artefact back to London, Mr Pickwick and his colleagues “entered into a variety of ingenious and erudite speculations on the meaning of the inscription”. In time, the object’s fame – and that of its discoverer – spread far and wide. The stone’s origins were debated by the Royal Antiquarian Society, while Mr Pickwick was elected an honorary member of no fewer than 17 learned societies in

LEFT: Mr Pickwick uncovers the mysteriously inscribed stone in the village of Cobham in Kent, while Mr Stumps looks on.

Britain and abroad.

Then the inevitable happened. A debunker named Mr Blotton (“the name will be doomed to the undying contempt of those who cultivate the mysterious and the sublime”) took it on himself to visit Cobham and interview the stone’s original seller. The man – a Mr Stumps – frankly admitted he carved the inscription himself. A cross accompanied by the words “Bill Stumps, his mark”, its indecipherability stemmed solely from the fact that Stumps wasn’t very adept at writing. Nevertheless, he was pretty certain that the stone itself (as he’d told Mr Pickwick) was very, very old. As for the antiquity of the inscription – Pickwick hadn’t asked about that!

What makes this such a perfect fortean parable is what comes next. Blotton’s debunking effort is like water off a duck’s back – it has no impact whatsoever on the ongoing flow of speculation: “The seventeen learned societies unanimously voted the presumptuous Blotton an ignorant meddler, and forthwith set to work upon more treatises than ever. And to this day the stone remains, an illegible monument of Mr Pickwick’s greatness, and a lasting trophy to the littleness of his enemies.”

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michael Innes, *The Weight of the Evidence*, Penguin Books, 1961 (see especially pp. 149, 204, 208-9, 224, 232)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/580>

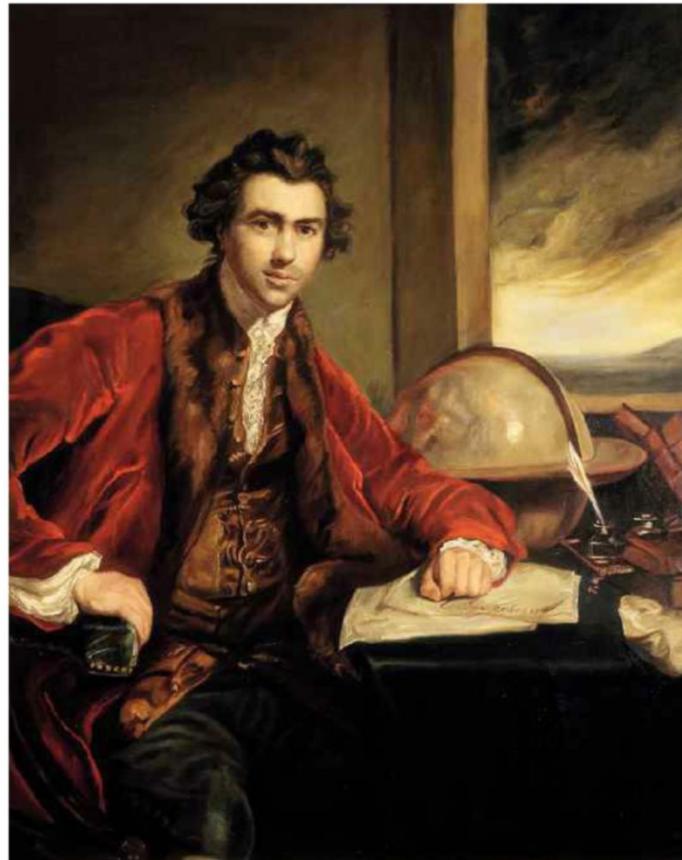
◆ ANDREW MAY’s new book *The Telescopic Tourist’s Guide to the Moon* is published by Springer ([www.amazon.co.uk/Telescopic-Tourists-Practical-Astronomy/dp/3319607405](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Telescopic-Tourists-Practical-Astronomy/dp/3319607405)).

## High priests and kraken soup

**Scientists were rather more open to the idea of giant squid than cryptozoologists think says CHARLES PAXTON**

**R**ichard Freeman in a recent opinion piece (FT357:55) discussed the fascinating life of Pierre Denys de Montfort, who, according to the article, died penniless in the gutter in Paris having seen his career destroyed because he argued for something that the “high priests of science deemed to be an old wives tale” – the existence of giant cephalopods (the taxonomic group that consists of squids, cuttlefishes and octopuses). It’s a great story, deriving in part from Bernard Heuvelmans’s early, rather odd interpretation of the history of the discovery of the giant squid, *Architeuthis*.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Denys de Montfort has not had his due, but at least part of this story is somewhat inaccurate: the high priests of science (or at the very least the British ones) did not disbelieve the existence of giant cephalopods. And this was not least because one high priest of science – Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and surely the personification of the scientific establishment in early 19th century Britain – would have had no doubt about the existence of large cephalopods at all. Indeed, it could be said that he would have happily swallowed the idea of large cephalopods – because in his youth he had eaten one!

In 1768, Joseph Banks, elected at the ridiculously young age of 23 to the Royal Society, was appointed as a naturalist on James Cook’s *Endeavour* expedition to the Pacific. One day, he embarked on an unusual meal. From the journal of Joseph Banks (reproduced verbatim): 3rd



March 1769 approx. Lat. 36° 49' S. Lon. 111° 34' W (co-ordinates taken from Cook's journal of same day). “I found also this day a large *Sepia* cuttle fish laying on the water just dead but so pulld to peices by the birds that his Species could not be determinid; only this I know that of him was made one of the best soups I ever eat. He was very large, differd from the Europeans in that his arms instead of being (like them) furnished with suckers were armd with a double row of very sharp talons, resembling in shape those of a cat and like them retractable into a sheath of skin from whence they might be thrust at pleasure.”

From the description, the species in question was not *Architeuthis*, the giant squid, but probably, given the location and the presence of the “talons”, *Taningia danæ*, which reaches

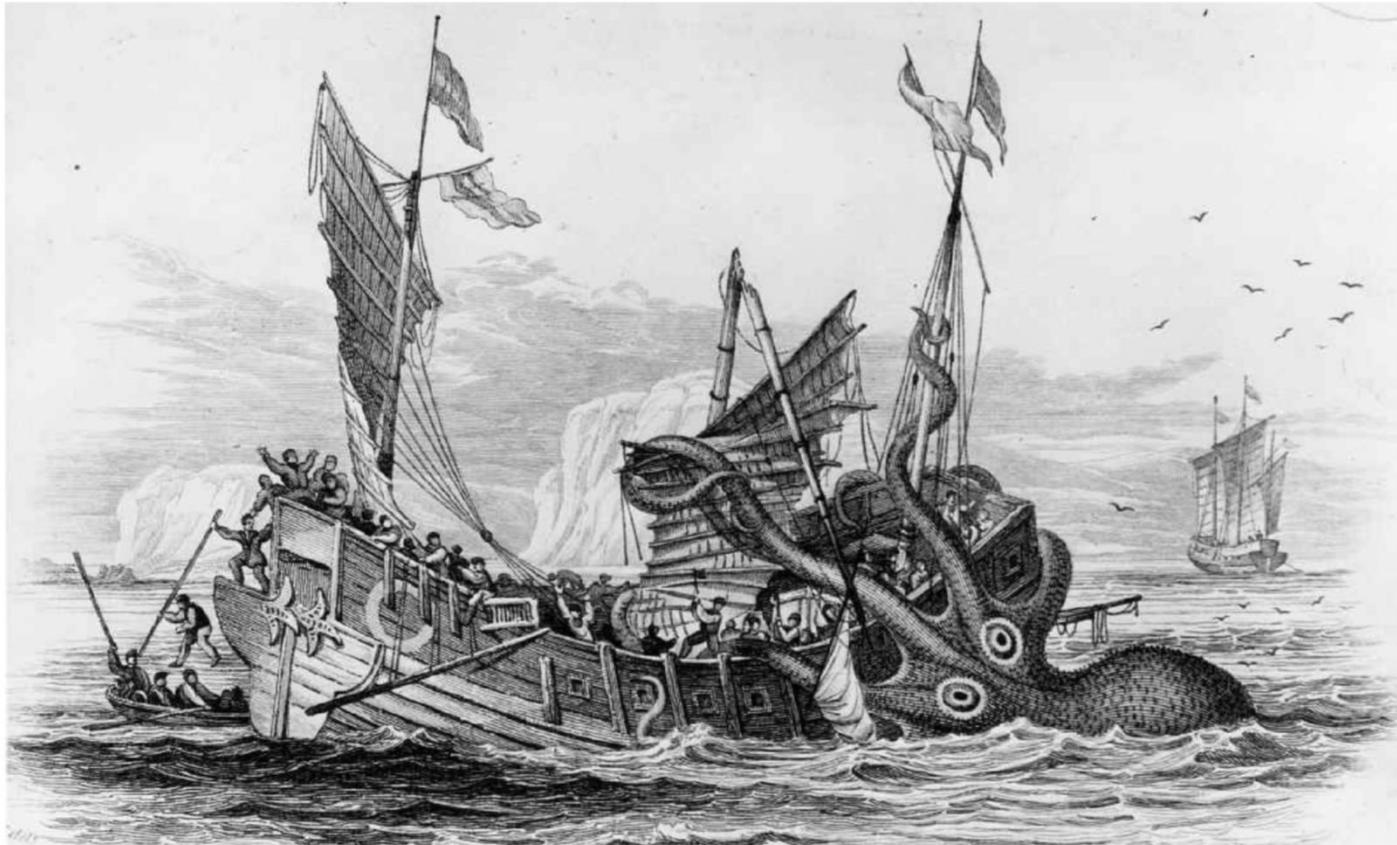
*“I found also this day a large Sepia cuttle fish laying on the water just dead”*

a respectable mantle (body) length of c.1.7m (5.6ft); or, if it was the same species that was returned to England after the expedition, *Onychoteuthis banksii*, which reaches a more modest mantle length of 30cm (12in) and seems irreconcilable with the description as “large”.

Banks returned to Britain and participated in the activities of the Royal Society. In 1788, he became President at the age of 35, a post he subsequently

held for 41 years. He pushed for expeditions around the world, including Captain Bligh’s expedition in the *Bounty*, advocated the colonisation of Australia and, as a committed scientific internationalist, tried to maintain scientific links with continental Europe during the Napoleonic wars. Like all members of the Society, he could present papers to be considered for publication in the house journal *Philosophical Transactions*. In 1783, he presented a paper by one Dr Schwediawer, “An Account of Ambergrise”, in which Schwediawer correctly recognised ambergris as a product of the digestion of squid beaks by sperm whales. Schwediawer mentioned a *Sepia* “tentaculum 27ft [8m] long” and went on to say: “When we consider the sheer bulk of the tentaculum of the *Sepia* here spoken of, we shall cease to wonder at the common saying of the fishermen that the cuttlefish is the largest fish in the sea.” This is not the only mention of big cephalopods in the pages of *Philosophical Transactions*. A paper in 1758 uncritically mentions Pliny’s discussion of large “polypi” in the Mediterranean. At no stage are the accounts dismissed as old wives’ tales or similar.

Schwediawer’s comment would go on to be cited uncritically by such books as Beale’s *Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (1839). So clearly some influential naturalists of the 18th and early 19th centuries had no problem with the idea of giant cephalopods. Did anyone disagree? Not that I can find, except for some faint doubt over the existence of large cephalopods that came from the zoologist Richard Owen, who in an article in Todd’s *Cyclopaedia of*



ABOVE: A kraken attacks a ship in an early 19th century engraving. Scientists doubted the destructive power of large cephalopods, but not their existence.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

*Anatomy and Physiology* (1836) wrote: "The natives of the Polynesian Islands, who dive for shell-fish, have a well-founded dread and abhorrence of these formidable Cephalopods, and one cannot feel surprised that their fears should have perhaps exaggerated their dimensions and destructive attributes." But he describes the squid Banks encountered as "gigantic" in the same article.

Thus, the early 19th century Anglophone zoologists, far from being close-minded priests, were open-minded naturalists. They had no reason to disbelieve accounts of giant 'calamaries' from the abundant eyewitness testimony and physical evidence of large species, but they might not have associated them with the kraken, as first-hand accounts of that monster were rare and, contrary to the perceptions of modern day cryptozoologists, the concept of "kraken" was somewhat amorphous (see FT:265:54). Sometimes it was employed as a generic term for

"sea monster" and it was not necessarily distinguished from a sea serpent in some sources as late as the second decade of the 19th century. More often it was a huge animal that looked like a large, flat island, albeit with horns that could emerge from the sea; but when its zoological affinities were speculated on, it could be a crab, brittlestar, halibut or cephalopod. Indeed, it was Denys de Montfort himself who did much to tie the idea of the kraken and cephalopod together.

I have not studied the French texts with regard to the reception of Denys de Montfort's ideas about the giant squid, but Heuvelmans lists some,<sup>2</sup> and it is clear that Denys de Montfort's claims about the existence of giant cephalopods was not the problem, but his somewhat unsupported claims about them attacking ships. Heuvelmans's last work on the history of the giant squid plays down the argument that the scientific establishment disbelieved in

the giant cephalopods prior to 1857, but still bizarrely insinuates there was a body of doubters out there – despite not citing a single text that advocates such a position, and mentioning only one after 1857! Scientists were rightly doubtful of animals capable of dragging boats to the depths, but not the existence of giant cephalopods *per se*. *Architeuthis*, when it was formally described, increased the size record for squid but hardly shattered the world-view of a zoological community well used to tales, and examples, of large specimens.

Science really is not a close-minded priesthood: all scientists require is evidence. Indeed, it does not even have to be physical, a fact that might surprise both believers and disbelievers in cryptids. For example, I recently argued on statistical grounds that *Architeuthis* could grow substantially longer than teuthologists suspected (although not as large as perhaps Denys de Montfort would have had the

world believe) and I managed to publish my arguments in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Zoology*.

The philosopher of science Paul Thagard suggested one difference between a science and a pseudoscience is that the latter never progresses.<sup>3</sup> If cryptozoologists wish to escape accusations of pseudoscience then, like scientists, they should be constantly developing new methods in the hunt for animals whose existence is controversial and challenging existing viewpoints, even of their own high priests like Heuvelmans. There really is very little evidence that a large body of zoologists doubted the existence of giant cephalopods prior to 1857.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Heuvelmans, *In the Wake of the Sea Serpent*, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Heuvelmans, *The Kraken and the Colossal Octopus*, Kegan Paul, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> PR Thagard, *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Science Association*,

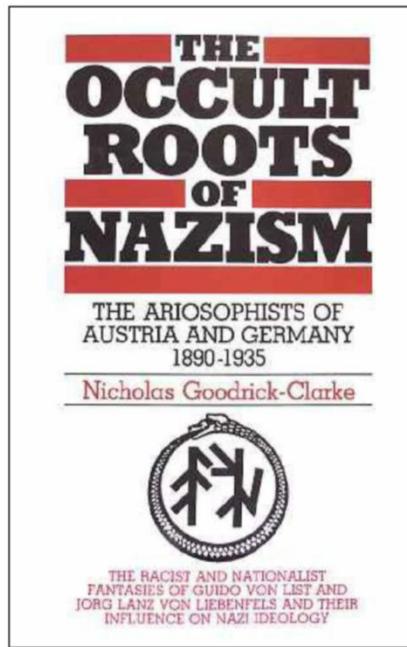
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## 28. A VILLAGE OF CRAZIES TO RAISE A MADMAN

"To a young observer," wrote Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke in 1985, "National Socialism appears as an uncanny interlude in modern history." At that time, 40 years after the collapse of the Third Reich, even not-so-youthful observers would have been equally bemused – then as now, another 30 years afterwards. Bemused not only by the sheer scale and seeming inexplicability of the monstrosities perpetrated by the Nazis, but also by the plethora of baroque claims that were made to account for the strange beliefs that they held and acted upon. The essential presumption of this latter exposition of alternative, crypto-history ('crypto' because it has no conventional documentation) is that Hitler and his gang of grotesques ventured so far outside any norm of modern Western humanity that they must have been in thrall to fiendish, supernatural powers – the kind of speculation that should have appealed to Dennis Wheatley (who, instead, preferred to think Communism was Satanic).

In *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke devotes an hilarious and eye-stilting appendix on the likes of Pauwels's and Bergier's *Morning of the Magicians*, which purports to show that "the Nazi leadership was determined to establish contact with an omnipotent subterranean theocracy and gain knowledge of its power". This was entangled with ideas filched from Helena Blavatsky (see FT302:2-37), who herself added plagiarism to her many imaginative talents, Joseph Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (a work of fiction featuring the Power of Vril; see FT292:63 and FT303:42-46), and others. The pair also 'exposed' the occultist and *völkisch* Thule Society as one "of initiates in communion with the Invisible, [which] became the magic centre of the Nazi movement." Unfortunately, there's no evidence that Hitler was ever a member, and the Society was dissolved eight years before the Nazis came to power. Then there was Trevor Ravenscroft and his unintentionally uproarious 1972 book *The Spear of Destiny* (see FT175:48-52). Too convoluted to recount in full here, its intricate plot had the Thule Society carrying out ritual torture and sacrifice of Jews and Communists, while its luminaries "contrived to develop and open the centres in the astral body of Adolf Hitler" and so "awakened [him] to the real motives of the Luciferic Principality which possessed him so that he could become the conscious vehicle of its evil intent...." All this, Goodrick-Clarke observes mildly, is "fanciful", and he cites much more like it, both from Ravenscroft and sundry other authors dealing in "wholly spurious 'facts'".



Goodrick-Clarke is wary of the possibility of any direct influence – for instance from the Thule Society and other 'ariosophists' – on the Nazis in their formative state. Rather, he excavates the soil in which sprouted what passes for Nazi philosophy, perhaps better described as a diseased *Weltanschauung*. There are three major strands to this: the general superiority of the Germans to everyone else; the diluted purity of the German race (notably by Jews and sundry Slavs), which in pristine form once gave them supernormal powers; and the need for a powerful leader to sort out the mess once and for all. The 'mess' was, in the first place,

created by the 1871 unification of Germany by Bismarck (who pronounced the King of Prussia Kaiser over all), which left millions of ethnic Germans scattered and dissatisfied throughout the multi-ethnic Hapsburg empire of Austria-Hungary. It was among these 'isolated' people that ariosophy initially arose, although it had been preceded as early as the 1840s by various right-wing youth movements. And the mess was compounded with the unimagined and unacceptable defeat of Germany in World War I, both in and of itself and in concert with the sudden blossoming of sundry Communist revolutions in Germany immediately after. And then, thanks in part to the humiliating and unnecessary provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, there was the crushing hyperinflation of the 1920s. These events more than anything contributed to the belief (mistaken as it turned out) that *ein Führer* of clear vision and unshakeable resolve was the solution to the national economic and psychological crisis.

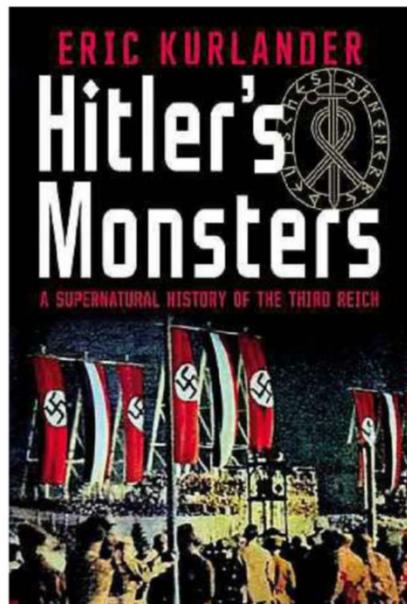
Feeding into this was the nearly untranslatable notion of the *volk*. Meaning more than just 'folk' or 'people', the word embodied a sense of almost mystical uniqueness, even chosen-ness, that harked back to a largely mythological, mostly mediæval German past. The ariosophists (see FT343:28-29) proceeded to create a longer, deeper and purer prehistory for the *volk* by proclaiming them – and plagiarising the dreaded Blavatsky – descendants of survivors of Atlantis, or Aryans from Tibet, people possessed of occult powers and dispossessed of them by the baneful influences of, and miscegenation with, lesser races (once again, Jews and Slavs, mostly). The long and wretched history of German antisemitism, encouraged not least by the semi-demented Martin Luther, was thus given a spurious but appealing underpinning. Wagner's rousing paeon to *die heilige deutsche Kunst* (holy German art) at the end of his otherwise most delightful opera confirms how deep the sense of German superiority went; and his vast and tedious *Ring* cycle underwrote the notion of German (Nordic) mythology as the only one worthy of attention. Wagner was, as the world knows, Hitler's favourite composer.

Goodrick-Clarke takes us through the

various groupuscules, semi-secret societies and ‘wandering prophets’ who constructed the ancient history of the ‘Aryan’ Germans. These fabricators included Manichean pagans, Grail-hunters, astrologers, phrenologists, dowsers, geomancers, seers and mystics and visionaries, graphologists, interpreters of the magical ancient runes and, of course, ferocious racists. More than one pronounced Germans to be gods, or at least god-like. One of the book’s greater pleasures is in observing how, as with most other excavations of ‘lost’ ancient history, few of their fictions agree with one another. Another is the sheer fantasticality of it all. Palmist Ernst Issberner-Haldane, for instance, when in Rio de Janeiro, “noticed the brothels were full of girls with Aryan features, clear evidence of a Jewish world-conspiracy to debase the female youth of the superior race”. For Guido von List anything from megalithic stone circles to the shapes of beams in half-timbered houses was evidence of a vanished Aryan high culture. Karl Maria Wiligut’s chronology of the ancient Germans started in 228,000 BC, “when there were three suns in the sky and the earth was populated with giants, dwarves, and other... mythical beings”. And its reliability doesn’t improve after that.

There is some – not wholly reliable – evidence that of all this bizarre literature, Hitler became familiar with Lanz von Liebenfels’s ariosophist journal *Ostara*, while living (1908–13) in Vienna (see FT218:32–39 for more on von List and Liebenfels). Whether it influenced him, or opened him to anything new, is impossible to say. Perhaps most likely is that it articulated and entrenched his own nascent ideas about pure German blood and soul, the obliquity of the Jews and their eternal conspiracies, and the need for a messiah-figure to purge the nation and the ‘Aryan’ race of such contaminations. But what Goodrick-Clarke shows is that these ideas were both long-standing and widespread in the Austria and Germany in which Hitler grew up. So, it is altogether plausible that he was familiar with them, even if not precisely an *aficionado* or member of any of the associated sects and cults. As Eric Kurlander puts it, “the occult doctrines permeating Vienna’s cafés and Munich’s beer halls before the First World War clearly helped to shape the Nazi supernatural imaginary.” By the time he came to power, Hitler didn’t need to be any kind of expert: he had his equally deranged, mythologically-obsessed sidekick Himmler to investigate the esoterica – and to take care of the practical details, from Tibet to Treblinka.

Eric Kurlander, in *Hitler’s Monsters*, looks at the question from the opposite direction – delving into the way the Nazi leadership engaged with the occult material that was swirling around in German culture. A major point is that in the years of the Weimar Republic, the society at large had become increasingly



## “WHERE THEY HAVE BURNED BOOKS, THEY WILL END IN BURNING HUMAN BEINGS.”

*Heinrich Heine*

irrational: there was, for instance, massive popular support for astrology, mythical pseudo-history, and parapsychology of a sensationalising kind as well as, of course, a growth in antisemitism. Jews were blamed for the military defeat in World War I (the infamous ‘stab in the back’ myth or *Dolchstoßlegende*) and, as bankers, for the post-war hyperinflation. The country was ripe for some form of extremist politics. To some extent Kurlander diverges from Goodrick-Clarke’s analysis, noting that while Hitler generally deprecated occult pursuits, he was not above hiring Germany’s foremost dowser (or ‘radiesthesiologist’ – that sounded so much more scientific) “to police the Reich Chancellery for harmful death rays”. And he placed no obstacle in the way of Himmler’s eccentric and sometimes lethal researches (see FT175:30–39, 196:32–39). A pair of his protégés justified the goal of a global German empire on the grounds that the country was the centre of a vast geomantic network of “substantial underground energies [that] once united ancient Indo-Aryan civilisations.” You couldn’t make it up: except they did.

Hitler himself entirely embraced Alfred Hörbiger’s *Welteislehre* – World Ice Theory (or ‘glacial cosmogony’, which also sounded scientific). Hörbiger proposed, essentially,

that the Solar System consists of ice, as does the Milky Way. You can look the whole thing up for your own amusement. Among its many other quirks, the theory says our current Moon (solid ice) is the sixth the Earth has had. Hörbiger’s comprehensive responses to more informed cosmologists were: “Calculation can only lead you astray”, and “Either you believe in me and learn, or you will be treated as the enemy”. *Welteislehre* appealed to Hitler precisely because it was “intuitive” – Hörbiger’s ‘theory’ had come to him in something like a vision – not coldly rational or by extension materialistic. And, even better, it cocked an almighty snook at relativity theory and other wicked excrescences of ‘Jewish science’, the teaching of which the Reich forbade. Yet, officially, the Nazis were opposed to occultism and what were politely called ‘border sciences’. They got around this difficulty by declaring ‘scientific’ astrology, parapsychology, *et cetera*, acceptable, but popular versions beyond the pale. In cases where there was any doubt, the test was simply whether the practitioner was a dedicated Party member. Hence various senior Nazis’ reliance on dowsing and astrology, and support of parapsychological research. Prominent in the last was Prof. Hans Bender, member of both the SA and the Party, facts not often mentioned on these shores, where he is best-known for promoting the ‘Rosenheim Poltergeist’. Critics have not been kind to his work. Those occultists of whom the Nazis disapproved were put out of business or jailed.

One of Kurlander’s more intriguing, lengthy asides concerns Hitler’s own hypnotic powers. He quotes various observers who had noticed how his speeches seemed to send his audiences into a kind of alternative state of consciousness. CG Jung thought this effect reflected “the deep beatitude of a thoroughly muddled soul”, whose power was “not political; it is magic”. At the same time, in full rhetorical flow, Hitler himself entered a kind of trance state. This is entirely plausible if one watches any film of Hitler in maximum rant mode, and – crucially – can translate what he’s saying. It doesn’t make much sense: it’s a weird *mélange* of non-sequiturs, slogans, and praises for the Party, the *volk*, Germany, and by implication himself. It was left to Rudolph Hess to be explicit at Nuremberg in 1934, roaring: “The Party is Hitler – and Hitler is Germany, just as Germany is Hitler!” And that all ended well, didn’t it?

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan cults and their influence on Nazi ideology*, (Aquarian Press 1985) Taurus Parke, 2004.

Eric Kurlander, *Hitler’s Monsters: A supernatural history of the Third Reich*, Yale University Press, 2017.

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## Fairies take to the witches' broom

The academic study of fairies and fairylore has had a chequered past, but this exemplary book throws a new light on 'experience anomalies' and the relationship of fairies and witches

### Magical Folk

Eds: Simon Young & Ceri Houlbrook

Gibson Square 2018

Hb, illus, notes, £16.99, ISBN 9781783341016

The study of fairies is critically dependent upon the reports of people who have experiences of fairies and the implications of those encounters – ‘close encounters’ to use the ufological parallel. A belief in the reality of fairies might not be necessary in all cases because we can find encounters which have taken the witness completely by surprise. Nevertheless, alongside the growing archive of personal accounts and narratives of encounters with fairies, there is a complementary field of study of beliefs in and about fairies, which draws upon anthropology, geography, cultural and sociological contexts as well as such ‘official’ theories about the nature and existence of fairies provided by local religion, theosophy, spiritualism and, above all, received folklore.

The scholarly study of fairies has, until recently, long endured a gauntlet of ignorance, derision, superstition, official scorn, and academic neglect. Yet we know that people still report seeing them regardless of whether anyone else takes them seriously. Are they mad? Deluded? Fraudulent? Are they so easily deceived by misidentification and misunderstanding of some natural phenomena? Significantly, a typical fairy witness tries to test whether their experience is an illusion only to end up realising that the intensity, apparent reality, startling behaviour of the entities, and overall strangeness of their experience has affected them in some way emotionally. We have centuries of myth, lore

and tradition informing our mental picture of what fairies are but there is nothing standard about fairies. Indeed, they are manifesting in such varying sizes, forms, and behaviour that it is sometimes difficult to see their relationship to locality is that of the anciently respected *genius loci*.

During the Victorian era, there was a degree of public awakening to the subject, the highlights of which were the blooming of folklore as a serious subject for academics and the publication of such influential works as those of Evans-Wentz, Hartland, and Yeats. After WWI, the burgeoning of both Spiritualism and Blavatsky’s Theosophy provided a ‘modern’ and more acceptable foundation for the very ancient belief that fairies were somehow associated with the dead. It is no coincidence that the invention of photography was quickly assimilated to both Spiritualism and fairy-hunting (vide the Cottingley fairy pictures which came to light via the Theosophists). At the same time, a strand of rationalism (that goes back to those men who founded the Royal Society) interpreted fairylore as a folk-memory of encounters with long-vanished Picts or even extinct races of dwarfs. After WWII, British folklorists returned fairy studies to the sphere of cultural and social heritage.

At this point, Simon Young reminds us, in the mid-20th century, the barely-understood forms of British and Irish fairies were led off, Pied Piper style, to Hollywood. There they were deprived of their ancient aura of spiritual and physical menace and re-shaped to serve commercial exploitation. The French folklorist Michel Meurger

*“dumbing down and exploitation proved a turn-off for academic interest in fairy encounters”*

has elsewhere highlighted how Nordic writers and artists, steeped in the folklore of central and northern Europe, were recruited by Disney to provide authentic imagery for their most famous cartoon movies.

Against this background, the Fairy Investigations Society (FIS) was founded in 1927; but, from 1950 it was developed and run by its secretary Marjorie T Johnson; and in its last years by the encyclopædist Leslie Shepard (an early supporter of FT). A tireless propagandist for the reality of fairies, Johnson and her FIS colleagues instigated an ambitious project to collect British accounts of fairy sightings from published records, recorded folklore narratives and from readers’ letters in newspapers. In 2013,

Simon Young – this book’s main editor – a successfully published historian and a regular contributor to FT – established, online, *The Fairyist* (*fairyist.com*) as rallying point for modern interest in the topic. As he took up the challenge of locating the files of the defunct FIS, Young explained that “the old FIS was exclusively for those who believed in fairies; the new FIS is a secular version for all those who have an interest in fairylore, be they believers or ultra-skeptics”.

Following his successful

location of the old FIS archives, Simon Young finished Marjorie Johnson’s work by completing the publication of *Seeing Fairies: From the Lost Archives of the Fairy Investigation Society, Authentic Reports of Fairies in Modern Times* in 2014. The following year, Young and his colleagues launched the most extensive public poll and survey of matters to do with fairies and fairylore, including welcoming accounts of sightings, since Johnson’s FIS poll 60 years previously.

The double-whammy of dumbing-down and commercial exploitation inevitably proved a major turn-off for academic interest in genuine fairy encounters and, inevitably, the general public were lulled into regarding the subject as one for children with over-active imaginations, minds too dull to discern errors of perception, or stolid types who were way too

credulous. Authentic narratives of encounters with fairies never really went away; they were – as happened throughout human history – simply never openly reported. Or rather, if they were reported at all, it was to local newspapers, or as sub-texts in other accounts of rural life, or hiding beneath the words of accounts in (for example) the Celtic languages (Gaelic, Cornish, Welsh).

Today the situation is different and developing along several exciting fronts. Firstly, there is a recognition of the relationship between fairies and witches. Previously regarded as adjacent or separate subjects, fresh light on the nature of witches’ familiars seems to



*Continued on p62*

# The truth is out there

The bewildering variety of UFOs – and their consistency over time – is clear in the National Archive's collection of ufological ‘folk art’

## **UFO Drawings From The National Archives**

David Clarke

Four Corners/The National Archives 2017  
Hb, 128pp, illus, £12.00, ISBN 9781909829091

As with their American intelligence and military counterparts, the UK Ministry of Defence did their best to explain away most UFO observations as mistakes of perception and overactive imaginations responding to explicable atmospheric phenomena or human technology, with photographic evidence resulting from distortions or hoaxing or other fakery. Included among the roughly 11,000 reported sightings in the Ministry's decades-long investigation of the UFO phenomenon (1940s-2009), when the Ministry's UFO desk and telephone hotline, initiated in 1962, were closed, are hundreds of eyewitness-provided illustrations featuring puzzling and at times inexplicable imagery, consisting of everything from hand-drawn recreations to professionally produced and incredibly detailed diagrams, to photographs of varying quality and detail.

Notwithstanding the Ministry's efforts, a significant



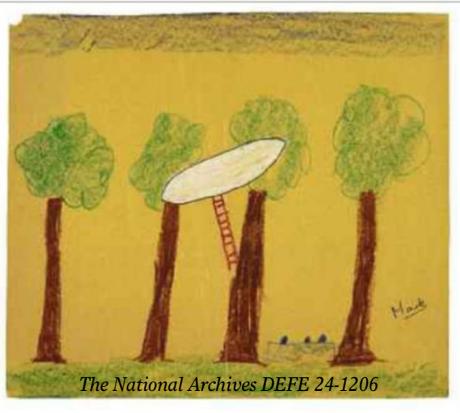
percentage of reported sightings remained truly mysterious. In *UFO Drawings from the National Archives*, a co-publication between Four Corners and the National Archives, Dr David Clarke, researcher and author of the recent history of the UFO phenomenon, the excellent, precise *How UFOs Conquered the World* (2015) and consultant on the public release of the Ministry of Defence's considerable holdings of UFO files, presents a carefully curated sampling of drawings (some of them are photographs) that accompanied these reports. Included here are familiar images – including the now-discredited ‘Solway Spaceman’ photograph – as well as more obscure yet no less fascinating and unsettling anomalies.

Clarke presents the material in chronological order with prefatory, matter-of-fact summaries of reports, largely without editorial comment. The chronological ordering provides the reader with a general sense of the UFO phenomenon's complexity, and the bewildering variety of its manifestations, including the different shapes, sizes, colours, sounds, and movements, as well as a sense of the ways in which the phenomenon has remained consistent in the face

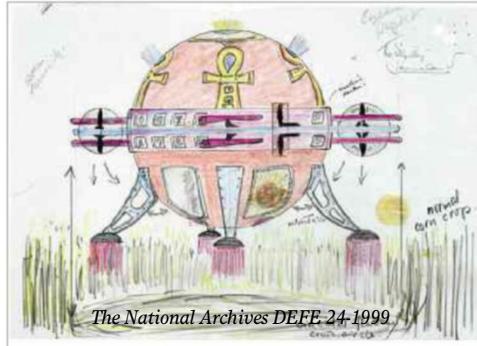
of significant social and cultural transformations over a 60-year period. At the same time, Clarke's straightforward presentation serves to illustrate the phenomenon's growing complexity, with decidedly technological cigar and saucer-shaped objects making their appearance during the 1950s and 1960s, followed by more high strangeness, close encounter-oriented reports documented in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally a swath of abduction-related and crop circle accounts from the late 80s to the late 90s.

Clarke's introduction provides a useful, concise history of the Ministry of Defence's involvement in collecting data on the UFO phenomenon. Though most of the drawings provided by eyewitnesses to the Ministry are mostly without pretence, comprising primarily pragmatic attempts by earnest eyewitnesses (some crackpot but mostly sober) to document apparently inexplicable atmospheric phenomena, some of the artwork included here approaches a kind of folk art. Indeed, despite Clarke's journalistic approach, there is much here of interest to the sociologist, folklorist, or UFO historian, making *UFO Drawings from the National Archives* a worthy addition to any fortean library.

Eric Hoffman



*The National Archives DEFE 24-1206*



*The National Archives DEFE 24-1999*

Continued from p61

show familiars and fairies to be fairly interchangeable (although witches tended to use demons for the Devil's work and fairies for influencing natural processes). The rump of this process is evident, for example, in the Irish tradition of Fairy Doctors who mediate between human society and the fairies, these ‘doctors’ filling, in all other respects, the traditional role of witches. Secondly, there is a shift in emphasis from studies of superstition and belief to studies of authentic narratives of claimed personal experience. Thirdly, and most importantly, there is growing acceptance of the hypothesis of parallels between the person at the heart of the fairy encounter – especially someone who regularly sees and interacts with fairies (like the Fairy Doctors) – and those we might call spontaneous shamans. Technically ‘shamanism’ proper applies to the ecstatic mediums of Siberia, but anthropological studies of cultures worldwide show people on the fringes of local societies undergoing processes corresponding to the ‘election’ of a shaman, his behavior, his relationship with ‘supernatural entities’, his use of psychoactive concoctions, and ecstatic journeys to the Otherworld. The experiences of some witches, encounters with fairies, demons or today’s aliens all display elements of shared phenomenology, ontology, epistemology and eschatology. In other words, fairy experiences can be legitimately studied as authentic (if unusual) ways of knowing and interacting with the world.

To some extent, this expansion of fairylore studies is due to the new generations of post-WWII folklorists who are not bogged-down in the stultifying narrow academic debates of previous eras, but are willing to enlarge the subject by importing data, insights and methods from recent advances in the arts, sciences and social sciences. The new folklorists have been wonderfully positioned – like forteans – to make the most of the increasing number of newspaper archives that are being digitised and made available online. Using the latest online research techniques, digital data-miners

are unearthing the kind of fascinating new narratives included here; many never before accessible to scholars.

*Magical Folk* is the first wholly new study of British and Irish fairylore in more than half a century. While the first 14 papers each explore a different geographical or cultural region of Britain and Ireland, the last three follow the belief across the Atlantic to examine the relocated fairy believers in New England, the eastern coast of Canada and Irish America. This makes perfect sense, as we now know that each wave of rural immigrants to the New World – especially after the Scottish Highland clearances and the famine that triggered the Irish diaspora – took their beliefs and traditions with them. That these beliefs (and the experiences they inform) are still active in the imagination of the modern descendants of those immigrants, was demonstrated by David Hufford's study of the experience of being 'hag-ridden' (i.e. 'night paralysis', in *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, 1982). The contributions in *Magical Folk* show, similarly, that the fairies – whatever they may be or represent – are still at work in the collective imagination.

This book is a perfect example of a revitalising folklore, even more so now that encounters with fairies, demons, aliens and poltergeists can be seen as different cultural adaptations that share a similar spectrum. As forteans, we wholeheartedly congratulate Dr Young and his colleagues for breathing new life into this venerable subject with their learned enthusiasm, shining new light upon what we call 'experience anomalies'. *Magical Folk* is an early taste of the success of the 'Fairystirs'; this time not so much from those who see fairies as from the new generation of academics, folklorists and others who think about them and what they mean. Regrettably for such detailed material there is no index, but this can be remedied in a new edition.

It is, nevertheless, vital and exciting reading for forteans and we look forward to further volumes.

Bob Rickard



## Haunted Landscapes

### Super-Nature and the Environment

Eds: Ruth Heholt & Niamh Downing

Rowman & Littlefield Intl 2016

Pb, 256pp, notes, bib, illus, ind, £27.95, ISBN 9781783488810

*Haunted Landscapes*, edited by Ruth Heholt and Niamh Downing, is an excellent overview of debates surrounding the uncanny, the supernatural and landscape.

I'll begin by recommending this book, but with one slight caveat; if phrases like 'diegetic space', 'chronotope' and 'Affect Theory' bring you out in hives, this may not be the collection for you. If it's your thing (it's definitely mine), then you will love this collection of diverse essays, with its discussions about embodiment and gendering of haunted spaces.

The writers adopt a wide range of approaches, but all have one thing in mind, as the title suggests: the nature of haunting within the landscape. Beyond that they vary greatly, from the Norfolk of W G Sebald, to the contentious geography of Whitechapel.

Derrida and his key text *Specters of Marx* loom large. There is some validity to arguments that hauntology has run its course and melted into a lazy stereotype. That's not the case with *Haunted Landscapes*. The variety and level of criticism means that many of the papers here feel fresh, and contain new insights.

For example, Daniel Weston's paper on the landscapes explored by Sebald contains some interesting observations about the distance between Sebald's writing, and the villages in that part of the country as lived places.

He states that "Ghostly presences and their revenance sap energy and life from depiction and representation."

Having grown up in the UK rather than on the continent, Derrida's concept of the *Specters of Marx* has always seemed slightly distant.

In *Witching Welcome*, Ryan Trimm talks about how Britain is haunted by 'Spectres of Empire', and for the first time this wider contextualising of hauntology made sense.

Downing's fascinating discussion of Jim Crace's *Being Dead* is a highlight. His novel

concerns a couple who are murdered and left to rot on a beach, that being the start of the story. Downing analyses this work of ecological uncanny with nuance and insight, pointing out "The ecological is a necessarily peculiar spectral realm." In many ways this felt like one of the most fortean papers in the book, with its emphasis on the boundaries between life and death, and the unsettling borders at the edge of nature.

The following chapter, about haunted landscapes in Victorian English Cities, continues the fortean tone, in relation to belief in ghost lore stating, "One must work with the reasonable assumption that there was a spectrum of engagement, ranging from genuine belief, through the operation of the 'ironic imagination' [...] to outright scepticism."

Other essays cover the work of film-makers Guillermo del Toro and Pasikowski, as well as the problematic nature of Heidegger's work, and the nature of the haunted landscape in *Coraline* and *ParaNorman* (Rebecca Lloyd making the point that the way 3D breaches the boundary between audience and film renders both as spectral presences, something that I think will be a recurring theme with Augmented Reality etc.).

Were there any problems with the volume? Only minor ones. I feel there was no need for so many of the essays to restate the origin of hauntology (Derrida, ontology etc.) in a book that is most likely aimed at an audience familiar with the concept. A description in the introduction and references back to this would have sufficed.

However, this is an excellent collection. My personal favourite? Rosario Arias's exploration of Sonia Overall's *The Realm of Shells*, using ideas of embodiment and the sensorial from the work of archæologist Yannis Hamilakis.

A highly recommended collection of academic essays, which will especially appeal to readers who like a bit of phenomenology and landscape theory to digest with their morning cup of coffee.

Steve Toase



## Popobawa

### Tanzanian Talk, Global Misreadings

Katrina Daly Thompson

Indiana University Press 2017

Pb, notes, bib, ind, \$30.00, ISBN 9780253024565

In 1995, reports reached the press that the inhabitants of Zanzibar and neighbouring islands off the coast of Tanzania were being attacked by a bat-winged, shape-shifting demon,

some claiming to have been sodomised by the eponymous Popobawa's huge penis. Katrina Daly Thompson, a Professor of African Languages, presents the fullest account one could wish for of this African trickster, having conducted interviews in the local language. After raping its paralysed male victims, the demon orders him "to tell ten people [...] or I will make you my wife". Consequently, the phenomenon was spread by chat and jokes, phone and text messages and news – bizarrely prefiguring a similar vector in the 1998 Japanese horror flick *Ring*. Popobawa became the butt of dark comedy throughout the Swahili-speaking world and beyond, remaining a popular topic to this day.



It was gratifying to see *Fortean Times* mentioned in an academic study, but Thompson's sole *FT* sources are Benjamin Radford's article in *FT241* (2008) and some discussion on the *FT* Forum, both used as examples of crass humour. Had she noticed that we first reported Popobawa 12 years earlier (*FT86*) and reported on similar panics – India's man-monkey, Sri Lankan 'oily man', Southern Africa's similarly big-dicked Tokoloshe and Central Africa's magical 'penis-thefts', etc – with hardly any jokes, she would have realised that we are genuinely interested in mass-sociogenic behaviour.

For Thompson, however, the Popobawa legend is a cultural vehicle for creative discourse "subverting gender segregation, advertising homosexuality, or discussing female sexuality", which she analyses across acres of sociological-lingo-laden pages about discourse, sexual taboos and prostitution.

Bob Rickard



# Seventy years of US UFOs

A security insider gives an outsider perspective on US government shenanigans regarding sightings from the Kenneth Arnold case onwards

## UFOs Today

**70 Years of Lies, Misinformation and Government Cover-Up**

Irena McCammon Scott, PhD

Flying Disk Press, 2017 ([flyingdiskpress.blogspot.co.uk/](http://flyingdiskpress.blogspot.co.uk/))  
Pb, 265pp, refs, notes, PRICE, ISBN 9780993492846

Dr Irena McCammon Scott certainly has the qualifications and background to consider the current state of ufology. Indeed, she has worked at the Battle Memorial Institute, which produced one of the first scientific studies of UFO sightings, and for the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).

Scott's work gave her top security clearances and she was even stationed at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the headquarters for the US Air Force's notorious Project Blue Book. Furthermore, her husband has worked in Area 51's Nevada Test Site.

Combined with this insider perspective, she has served as a field investigator for the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) and Centre for UFO Studies (CUFOS) and interviewed many witnesses and experts.

Although promising some new 'smoking gun discoveries', Scott's introduction does wimp-out with the warning: 'Even if the phenomena in question were not extraterrestrial, it is still vital to record this material because of the tremendous impact of UFO phenomena upon our civilization and psychology.'

The book covers all the main landmarks of ufology, starting with Kenneth Arnold's flying saucers and on to the US involvement with the subject and UFO crash accounts,

followed by chapters on the highlights of each decade from the 1940s to the new millennium.

From the very beginning of the saucer era, Scott notes, Arnold's sighting and his involvement with Maury Island involved many strange elements that seem to rule out a hoax. She even wonders if Arnold, who was at the centre of these puzzling events, was abducted at some stage, and those involved with investigating Maury Island were murdered because they knew too much. It all adds to her view that US agencies were involved in running a sophisticated operation to discredit Arnold, in order to keep a lid on the subject.

Scott provides a good review of US ufology and the US Government's fragmented, dubious and nefarious involvement with it. Yet, rather frustratingly most of her 'smoking gun' evidence is based on anecdotal testimony rather than any material evidence or hard facts. For example, she simply says Battle 'may be' researching UFOs today and that Wright Patterson 'may' also be conducting similar research. She says the CIA could also be involved, adding: "However, even though I worked in the office whose mission was to identify all flying objects over an important area, my section received no briefing about UFO phenomena."

In the last chapter, it is considered whether UFOs are real or not. Scott is satisfied that there is enough evidence to say there is a reality to some of the UFO phenomena beyond misidentifications and

mundane explanations.

She notes: 'Rather than space ships, some UFOs may also represent drones, robots, or some sort of artificial force fields created by non-humans. Other portions of UFO phenomena may represent unknown natural events. As discussed in the Skinwalker study, a part of UFO phenomenon may also represent some form of tunnel or wormhole into other dimensions and worlds. In addition, what one sees may depend upon their interpretation. For example, if one sees a floating orb or a humanoid, one might view it as form of ghost. But if one sees the same type of phenomena, but it looks like a floating craft, one would then interpret it as a UFO or space ship.'

That covers virtually every aspect of ufology from the nuts and bolts perspective to the psychosocial hypothesis. Unfortunately, Scott doesn't take much time to look at the wider context of these sightings and is more interested in the 'hard' scientific viewpoint, leading her to suggest that high quality UFO data is collected and analysed, statisticians should look at the existing data, UFO observation stations should be set up, continuing the petitioning of government agencies, encouraging a scientific approach and looking at new scientific models of quantum interactions to understand a phenomenon "that may not be under human control".

These are all things ufologists have been attempting to do for decades and it all seems a bit pointless if we 'may' already have the smoking gun evidence. Then again the US government has effectively covered this up so we'll never know, and if we do 'they' will discredit or murder you.

Nigel Watson



## A Cabinet of Byzantine Curiosities

Anthony Kaldellis

Oxford University Press 2017  
Hb, 248pp, gloss, notes, £12.99, ISBN 9780190625948



The blurb describes this delightful tome as a "vast assortment of historical anomaly and absurdity." The author, a classics professor at Ohio State University, slyly admits: "The book even has uses for those who do not actually wish to read it: for example, it may be reviewed."

At least since the Enlightenment, the great eastern Roman Empire has had a bad press: the adjective Byzantine still implies needlessly complicated systems that operate through intrigue, obfuscation and backstabbing. This book, Prof Kaldellis says, is "primarily a work of entertainment. Each item is self-contained, so the whole can be read in snatches" – perfect for the smallest room in the house. It fits neatly into the Byzantine tradition: "Their culture, after all, produced many thematic anthologies, paradoxography, and collections of edifying tales and miracles, along with books of quotations." Topics covered by the 18 chapters include marriage and the family, unorthodox sex, animals, food (from aphrodisiacs to garon or rotting fish sauce), eunuchs, medicine, technology, war (flamethrowers, hand grenades etc), saints, heresy and scandal, rogues, insults, punishments, foreigners, and disasters.

Some entries are memorably odd: "Philostorgios (ca. 425) wrote that the unicorn lived in India: it had a serpent's head and coiled neck, a crooked horn, a beard, and lion's feet." And others are quite bawdy: "Theology by flatulence – the Arian theologian Aetios (fourth century) illustrated the various theological positions regarding the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by farting. Three farts of identical volume stood for the theology of his opponents, while three farts of decreasing volume signified his own." That's what Theodoros of Mopsuestia tells us, anyway.

Paul Sieveking





## ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

**Sky Critters****UFOs, Science and Extraterrestrials***Anthony Milne*

Empiricus Books 2016

PB, 272pp illus, notes, ind, £13.95, ISBN 9781857568615

It may seem odd that there is still a community 'out there' who believe that UFOs are alien intelligences in the form of shape-changing luminous orbs. Anthony Milne is obviously a passionate and veteran believer, and presents the history and his analysis of the idea with skill and care, tracing it back to Conan Doyle's 1913 short story 'The Horror of the Heights' and the work of the Borderland Sciences Research Foundation (BSRF, established 1951) in keeping the subject alive over the decades.

Other prominent promoters have been Wilhelm Reich and Trevor James Constable; the latter's 1958 book *The Cosmic Pulse of Life* created a bridge between Reich's 'orgone', the BRSF's 'Ether Ships' and modern UFOs.

It's amusing to think that the idea of UFOs as an interplanetary form of energy-based intelligence has a longer shelf-life than the equally old concept of UFOs as 'nuts-and-bolts' alien craft. However, the blurry photos of shapeless blobs in the sky, relied upon in this book, still fail to convince.

**Being with the Aliens****The How and the Why of ET Contact***Miguel Mendonça*

wearethediscovery.com/Amazon 2017

Pb, 307pp, £13.99, ISBN 9781544270852

We previously reviewed Miguel Mendonça's *Meet the Hybrids* (**FT350:63**); *Being with the Aliens* is, apparently the final part of a trilogy on alien-human interaction. He deals head-on with the persistent claim from an ever-growing group of individuals who believe – passionately and sincerely – that they are only part or passively human; that the larger, louder, more significant part of their lives is not everyday human but something else. This might possibly be analogous to

the problems facing those with gender-identity disorder, in that they share a need to overcome the prejudice by others and desire from others better understanding of what they are going through.

The nine individuals interviewed here have contacted or been contacted by "non-human intelligences", amplifying their psychic abilities and artistic talents through "direct, meaningful contact", bolstering their self-confidence through "channelling" and sharing experiences.

This does not sound like the demonology – or ufology – of old, but something new; something that is difficult for the rest of us to understand.

**The Global Mind and the Rise of Civilisation****The Quantum Evolution of Consciousness***Carl Johan Calleman*

Bear &amp; Co 2016

Pb, 300pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$20.00, ISBN 9781591432418

This is a reprint from 2014, but bears some relationship to the previous book reviewed here. Calleman is a physical biologist and expert on the Mayan culture and calendar. His study of the steps by which cultures advance led him to predict that the next big step in neurological and cultural evolution is imminent. Where the previous author (Mendonça) interprets the murmurs and quakes of the modern psyche as alien or non-human in origin, Calleman argues for a global consciousness.

An interesting thesis, well-written and argued.

**Science for heretics****Why So Much of Science Is Wrong***Barrie Condon*

Self-published via Amazon 2015

Pb, 470pp, refs, £9.99, ISBN 9781534820586

The rise of the Internet and new means of self-publishing are piling up mountains of books on the shoulders of the world that no amount of shrugging by Atlas can dislodge. It's easy to understand why this book would

not have found a conventional publisher. It is a monolithic block of unforgiving text, densely written in a typewriter-font, with few references, fewer headings, no illustrations and no index. The author has degrees in physics, oceanography and nuclear medicine and has been a medical consultant for the UK's NHS, with over 80 papers to his credit. His message? That there are "profound problems with all aspects of scientific theory and method"; and that ever-narrowing specialisation in science and technology is failing to answer the problems facing society as a whole, and the psychological, spiritual and social plight of individuals in particular.

While most of the book is his critical analysis of the failings of orthodox science and religion, his answer is hard to find. Throughout the book he characterises himself as 'The Heretic' in order to question everything.

Buried in there is a simple plea to take away the blinkers on science and religion, but it's a hard slog getting to it. It's up to you to decide if this is enough.

**Real Visitors****Voices from Beyond and Parallel Dimensions***Brad and Sherry Hansen Steiger*

Visible Ink 2016

PB, 432pp, illus, reading list, ind, £19.95, ISBN 9781578595419

*Real Visitors* is the latest in a line of similar tomes from the Steigers and, much like the others, it is a sprawling compilation of short pieces on an eclectic range of topics radiating from its central theme. In this case, it is about the different ways in which certain people may encounter entities who convey (what seem to be) guidance or messages.

These 'contacts', may be convoluted or enigmatic as was well-known in the days of sibyls and oracles, or they may be direct and personal. Their essence is always provocative, demanding of attention, and strange. They come from 'somewhere else', planes with guarded names like Beyond, Otherworld, and Afterlife,

adopting suitably disturbing disguises from the daydreams and nightmares of our species. The Visitors and the people they visit – psychics, prophets, shamans, dreamers, mediums, outsiders, misfits and yearners – seem to need each other as much as they both need Meaning and Belonging.

The Steigers are at their best at interviewing and bringing out individual stories, but their steadfast mission is to serve the Believers. There is little here in the way of old-fashioned, independent or unequivocal evidence, as each account – regardless of contradictions or subjectivity – is given equal weight in a court that *a priori* 'believes' every witness. The end result of this approach, sadly, is that we are left with no way to assess a story's value to ourselves.

**Bad Girls From History****Wicked or misunderstood?***Dee Gordon*

Pen and Sword 2017

Pb, 148pp, illus, bib, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781473862821

The cover of *Bad Girls from History: Wicked or Misunderstood* – apparently the result of years of research – features Mata Hari, George Sand and Lizzie Borden, with smaller images of Bonnie Parker, Barbara Villiers, Irma Grese, Emma Hamilton, Amelia Dyer and Mae West. Irma Grese, "the beautiful beast of Belsen", was definitely bad... but George Sand? The back cover asks whether the women are wicked, misunderstood or "just out of their time. Read... and decide", pretty much an indication of fudge. Many of the women in the first chapter, 'Courtesans and mistresses' (a courtesan is "a whore with classy clients!"), an example of the book's leaden humour) used sex for advancement, pleasure or survival. It's a relief to get to 'Serial killers' and 'Gangsters, thieves and con-artists', including Diamond Annie of the Elephant Gang and Sadie the Goat. And then we're back to 'The rebel collection' and Mary Wollstonecraft. Bizarre.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

## The Force reawakened

The latest instalment in the *Star Wars* saga abandons the nostalgia-fuelled greatest hits approach of JJ Abrams in favour of a forward-looking perspective that brings something new to the table



**Star Wars:  
The Last Jedi**  
Dir Rian Johnson, US 2017  
On UK release

When *The Force Awakens* was released in 2015, it was met with overwhelmingly favourable reviews [not here, it wasn't – Ed], and fans for the most part seemed thoroughly pleased with the continuation of the beloved saga. The cause for the success was largely attributed to JJ Abrams having managed to bring the franchise back to its roots in terms of tone and atmosphere and a cast full of compelling new additions. However, with a change of director and the untimely death of the inimitable Carrie Fisher, people wondered where director Rian Johnson would take the saga, as the ominous title *The Last Jedi* and the secretive marketing campaign seemed to suggest that this latest instalment would be a far darker outing than its predecessor.

Picking up where *The Force Awakens* left off, *The Last Jedi* builds on the playfulness of the highly retrospective seventh instalment in the episodic film saga. That being said, Johnson quickly establishes his own

*The lore of the saga is expanded upon in a deeply satisfying manner*

distinct tone and style for the film, which in part means that the nostalgic call-backs to the original trilogy have been dialled down significantly. Offering a fresh perspective and storyline, Johnson instead presents the audience with a *Star Wars* film that looks to the future of the franchise rather than dwelling on the past, both in terms of the story itself as well as the narrative structure.

The visuals are stunning, often presenting the viewer with breathtaking cinematography that makes a seemingly endless number of frames stand out like paintings on a gallery wall. The composition of the action sequences is also exquisite, drawing many parallels with the Japanese samurai films that inspired the original *Star Wars* trilogy. As for the execution of the fight choreography, Daisy Ridley and Adam Driver bring a

fierce energy to these sequences, which makes the scenes they are involved in thoroughly exhilarating action set pieces.

However, what truly shines in *The Last Jedi* is the character development. The arcs of Driver's Kylo Ren and Ridley's Rey develop and intensify brilliantly, enhancing the main storyline of the film, which is brimming with mystery and intrigue. The very complexity of this storyline may alienate the casual viewer, but the long-suffering fans of the film franchise will likely find that the lore of the saga is being expanded upon in a deeply satisfying manner.

In terms of the supporting characters, on the First Order side of things, Domhnall Gleeson's General Hux is given more screentime this time around, giving the versatile actor the opportunity to further flesh out his character and join the menacing ranks of the dastardly officers that served the masters of the dark side in the original trilogy. Supreme Leader Snoke also becomes a more sinister presence, with Andy Serkis once again doing a great job with a fully animated character.

For the Resistance, Kelly

Marie Tran's Rose makes for a compelling new addition who spars well with John Boyega's Finn as the two characters find common ground. Oscar Isaac gets to command the screen, and more superb space battles, and his role here is more substantial than it was in *The Force Awakens*, properly showcasing Isaac's intensity as he channels the rebellious nature of Poe Dameron.

Mark Hamill delivers a remarkable performance, making the exiled and aging Luke Skywalker not only his most captivating turn as the powerful Jedi since the character was introduced, but also one of the best outings of his career. Lastly, Carrie Fisher's sombre performance serves as a bittersweet swansong for the actress, as she portrays the iconic princess-turned-general with a renewed depth that does both the actress and the character justice.

As excellent as *The Last Jedi* largely is, it is not flawless. During the first act in particular, the drama and tension is continuously undercut by the use of bathos, where there is a sudden shift from the serious to the trivial for comedic effect. This does detract from the film overall, in much the same way that the Marvel Cinematic Universe is also increasingly let down by its over-reliance on humour.

The biggest issue, however, is a side mission during the second act; not only running overly long and thereby slowing down the pacing of the film significantly, this pointless distraction also serves as an unwelcome reminder of the prequel trilogy in terms of narrative, tone and style. Thankfully, the last part of the second act and the entire third act is perfectly balanced and nail-bitingly intense. All in all, the Force is truly strong with this one.

Leyla Mikkelsen





## Tokyo Ghoul

Dir Kentarō Hagiwara, Japan 2017  
On limited UK release from 31 Jan

With 2017's lamentably tone-deaf Hollywood live action adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* still haunting the pop-cultural subconscious, Japanese live-action adaptations of manga and anime are a more welcome sight than ever. While *Tokyo Ghoul* may lack the artistic panache of, for example, Takashi Miike's adaptation of *Blade of the Immortal*, this version of the supernatural manga and anime still has sufficient visual and narrative appeal to please fans of the source material; and fans of Japanese cinema in general may find the film compelling if their interest is piqued by the subject matter. The pacing is slow but smooth, taking its time to establish the world of *Tokyo Ghoul* and the people who inhabit it. The main character, Ken Kaneki, is well portrayed, however the emphasis is almost solely on his disgust at being a ghoul rather than balancing it with his increasing embrace of his powers. Thankfully, the supporting characters make up for the shortcomings of Kaneki's transfer from the source material to the big screen, with the assertive Touka being a particular standout among the protagonist's ghoul posse. Once we reach the finale, it does to some extent go off the rails tonally, resulting in some of the final confrontations falling a bit flat. However, as a whole, *Tokyo Ghoul* is a likable and faithful adaptation that will doubtless please fans familiar with the narrative style and tone associated with the original.

Leyla Mikkelsen



## The Bird With the Crystal Plumage

Dir Dario Argento, Italy 1970  
Arrow Video, £29.99 (Dual format)

Forty-odd years on from his heyday, Italian director Dario Argento is still the best known exponent of the horror subgenre known as *giallo*. The *giallo* is a type of thriller with very defined elements, which takes its name from the yellow covers of pulp crime novels in Italy. Essentially a whodunnit, the *giallo* generally has a series of murders committed

by a masked or fleetingly-seen villain who uses a cruel or unusual method of dispatching his victims and is not unmasked until the climax. The hero, sometimes a journalist or a relative of the first victim, struggles to identify the culprit but hits on a key clue just before the end, leading to a final confrontation. Having said all that, what sets the *giallo* apart from more mainstream thrillers is that the plot is simply a vehicle for a series of stylish and often violent set-piece sequences. *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* wasn't the first *giallo* but it's among the best, and is also notable for being Argento's debut feature.

Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante) is an American writer living and working in Italy. One night he witnesses a brutal attempted murder in an art gallery; speaking to the police he learns that the city is experiencing a wave of such attacks. Convinced he saw something that night which holds the key to the killer's identity, he conducts his own investigation into the crimes thereby putting himself and his girlfriend Julia (Suzy Kendall) in mortal danger.

Argento's skills as a director are an absolute command of filmmaking technique, a superb eye, and a flamboyant style; his use of widescreen and flashes of vivid colour are particularly noteworthy and both much in evidence here. On top of that, he always acted as his own scriptwriter with the result that story and visuals were perfectly matched. In *Bird* he creates some especially memorable supporting characters: the wildly camp antique shop owner, the wildly eccentric artist, and the wildly vicious hit man, for example.

Argento's films were absolutely made for Blu-ray and Arrow Video have pulled out all the stops for this reissue which is a 4K restoration from the original negative. Crucially, it is in its original 2.35:1 aspect ratio (thereby correcting a problem hanging over from an earlier edition) which preserves Argento's meticulous framings.

There are a multitude of extras too, for those wanting to explore this fascinating subgenre more deeply.

Daniel King



## SHORTS

### DON'T TORTURE A DUCKLING

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

I guess it's easy for casual viewers to dismiss Lucio Fulci as a gore-and-sex-crazed hack. His work certainly pulls no punches in terms of squirmly violence. Yet despite the gonzo sounding title, *Don't Torture a Duckling* should help show the cynics what most horror fans knew already: the guy had some great cinematic and storytelling chops. Beautifully photographed and cleverly plotted, this thriller centres on a series of child murders in an Italian village. It's a surprisingly sensitive and thought-provoking piece, and pretty darn disturbing in places too, particularly in a scene showing an extended beating accompanied by the slinky pop tunes of a radio. Watch that as a stand-alone clip on YouTube, and you'll think Fulci gets off on violence. Watch it in the movie though, and you'll see the context and the truth: he's simply willing to show how horrendous and mindless real-life violence can be. **Peter Laws** ★★★★★

### MADHOUSE

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

One of innumerable slashers from the early 1980s, *Madhouse* stands out because of its classy widescreen cinematography, a couple of memorable gore moments and its nonsensical plot. Despite the film's Italian pedigree, the location is Savannah, Georgia, where saintly Julia (the lovely Trish Everly, who subsequently disappeared without trace) is a teacher of deaf children. Unfortunately for Julia, she has an evil twin sister who ruined her childhood and has now escaped from hospital swearing to make her sibling's life a misery. Julia's only allies are her boyfriend Sam (Michael Macrae) and her uncle James (Dennis Robertson), a priest. Seeing that Julia lives in a spooky old building (apparently a real location, the grand old former funeral parlour Kehoe House) there's plenty of scope for creaking doors, dingy basements and footsteps on stairs. And who better to exploit a plot and setting such as this than genre maestro Ovidio G Assonitis, he of *Beyond the Door*, *Tentacles* and *The Visitor* among many others? Producing and directing here, he makes a decent fist of it in a Lucio Fulci style – by which I mean stylish and violent nonsense. So violent, in fact, that *Madhouse* was on the DPP's original list of 39 'video nasties' in 1983 during all the puritanical hoo-hah. As a result, it never received a theatrical release in the UK. This version, though, is uncut, looks great in 2.35:1 and comes in a set which includes some cast and crew interviews and a full-length yak track by the people from *The Hysteria Continues* podcast. **Daniel King** ★★★★★

### THE GHOUl

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

Writer/director Gareth Tunley's low-budget British chiller is an eerie, resolutely translucent mood piece which grips from the get-go. A grotesquely described 'headscratcher' of a crime leads policeman Chris to pose as a patient of the mysterious psychotherapist Dr Fisher... or does it? The film plays the are-they-mad-or-is-he? card early on, and does not provide easy answers. A throwaway reference to sorcerers might be the key to the whole thing, or it might not. Spinning tales of Klein bottles, Möbius strips and Ouroboros, the film is itself a knot of possibilities composed, both formally and thematically, of a kind of fug; a sweaty, tense nightmare which refuses to end. That it manages to be both laugh-out-loud funny and shit-scary is a testament to the talent involved. It won't be to everyone's tastes, but if you let yourself go with it skin prickling is guaranteed. **Martin Parsons** ★★★★★



## SOUNDS PECULIAR

BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

**A**s a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



**Podcast: The Paranormal Podcast**

**Web:** <http://jimharold.com/category/the-paranormal-podcast/>

**Host:** Jim Harold

**Episodes Count:** 500+

**Format:** Interviews, Features, Discussion

**Established:** 2005

**Frequency:** Weekly

**Topics:** Everything paranormal

Claiming to be “America’s most popular paranormal podcast host”, Jim Harold has been presenting *The Paranormal Podcast* since 2005 and claims a total of “over 31 million” downloads. Like some of the best podcasters, Ohio-based Harold comes from a professional radio background, although he was previously on the business side of broadcasting rather than the creative or presentational. He combined that with his lifelong interest in the paranormal to put together *The Paranormal Podcast* around 12 years

ago. According to podcast hosting company Libsyn, *The Paranormal Podcast* is among the top two per cent of all podcasts in downloads, suggesting a significant audience.

The show recently reached its 500th instalment, focusing on the ‘Mandela Effect’. Author and researcher Stasha Eriksen is Harold’s guest in discussing this particular aspect of ‘false memory syndrome’. Around 2010, the phenomenon of collective false memory was dubbed ‘the Mandela Effect’ – cited as being a group recall of something, often in popular culture, that appears to be different – or to have changed – from how it was widely remembered. Self-described ‘paranormal consultant’ Fiona Broome originally coined the phrase after the apparently increasing tendency for people to misdate the death of South African freedom campaigner Nelson Mandela to the 1980s rather than 2013, when he actually died.

Several explanations for such faulty recall are discussed, including social reinforcement of incorrect memories or the impact of ‘fake news’, an increasing problem in the era of Trump. Perhaps the most interesting possible explanation is the question of alternative realities: perhaps in another

reality you (and many others) once inhabited, the thing you misremember was in fact as you recall it. Either reality has changed, your perception has changed, or you have slipped into an alternate reality different in small ways from the history you recall. One of the most impactful examples of ‘the Mandela Effect’ as applied to popular culture concerns one of the main characters in the *Star Wars* movies. The vast majority of people have seen the films, either at the cinema or on TV, videotape or DVD and know the main characters. One of those characters is fussy droid C-3PO, played by Anthony Daniels. If asked what colour C-3PO is, most people reply ‘gold’. What many people have never consciously noted is that C-3PO has one silver leg, from the knee down, and apparently always has had. Type ‘C-3PO’ into Google and it auto-completes to the phrase ‘C-3PO silver leg’ due to the fact that so many people have wanted to double check this for themselves.

A more recent episode tackled the supposed rivalry between Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison in their efforts to invent a telephone for contacting the dead (#503). Guest William J Birnes (previously publisher of *UFO Magazine* and a frequent

History Channel guest) promotes his book, which outlines the two scientists’ interest in a ‘spirit phone’, essentially a receiver for the frequencies of disincarnate spirits, something Birnes claims has been reclassified in recent times as EVP (electronic voice phenomenon). The angle taken here is how history tends to ignore or write out such maverick scientific interests in favour of those that can be packaged and sold to the masses (like the ‘normal’ telephone). They examine the process by which this removal of Fort’s ‘damned data’ occurs.

Such in-depth, discursive chats are central to *The Paranormal Podcast*, and over 12 years the show has covered just about any paranormal topic you’d care to think of. Listeners might be annoyed by the lengthy ad breaks that pop up through the 90-minutes-plus run time of each instalment, and anything older than 90 days requires a subscription, but that gives free access to 12-13 recent episodes at any time. Shows still available at the time of writing include shapeshifters (#502, featuring Nick Redfern); demons, the Devil, and fallen angels (#501); haunted woodlands in Massachusetts (#499); haunted Disneyland (#498); the Mothman’s relocation to Chicago (#497); and the seemingly inevitable Roswell UFO cover-up episode (#491).

**Strengths:** In-depth discussions of each topic; a wide range of subjects.

**Weaknesses:** Frequent ad interruption; lack of access to older instalments beyond 90 days; a certain American credulity...

**Recommended Episodes:** Shapeshifters (#502); Demons and fallen angels (#501); Haunted Disneyland (#498); Paranormal travel tales (#493); Roswell UFO cover-up (#491); Nazca lines (#490).

**Verdict:** Worthwhile chats and subjects, if you can take the credulity of the presentation and the commercial breaks.

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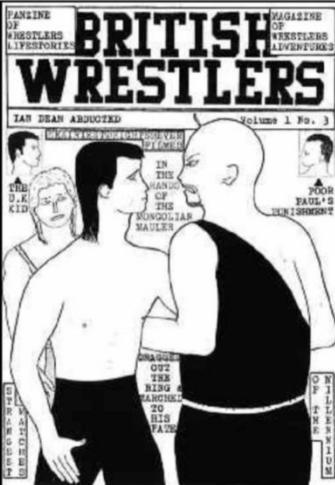
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Tatiana, 8 September

British wrestling always had a dark side. This magazine explores it. Send SAE for details.

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# LETTERS

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## Pet Theories

While many claims of ‘psychic pets and animal apparitions’ [FT360:18-20] must necessarily remain anecdotal, it is worth pointing out that in the case of Jaytee, the dog who could allegedly psychically predict when his owner was returning home, two investigations were carried out by separate teams on the same subject at roughly the same time and reached different conclusions. In addition to the work undertaken by Rupert Sheldrake there was also a study of Jaytee by Richard Wiseman (along with Matthew Smith and Julie Milton) published in the *British Journal of Psychology* and elsewhere. They found various normal explanations that might account for the phenomenon and no compelling evidence of psychic ability in the dog.

**Martin Stubbs**  
London

Dr Rupert Sheldrake responds:  
*Martin Stubbs rightly says that the research that I did with the return anticipating dog Jaytee was investigated separately by Richard Wiseman and his colleagues. Their results almost exactly replicated my own, with the dog visiting the door or window only 4% of the time while his owner, Pam Smart, was out, and waiting there 78% of the time when she was on her way home. This effect was significant statistically.*

*Richard Wiseman is a committed sceptic and he seriously misrepresented his results in the media. This case has been widely discussed as a case study of sceptical bias in a number of books including Robert McLuhan's The Randi Prize and Will Storr's Heretics: Adventures with the Enemies of Science. A short video about this case is available online here <https://www.sheldrake.org/videos/richard-wiseman-s-failed-attempt-to-debunk-the-psychic-pet-phenomenon>*

*There is in fact much evidence for the anticipation of returns by Jaytee and other dogs and cats. My results have been published in peer reviewed journals and can be read online on my website here <https://www.sheldrake.org/research/animal-powers>.*

## SIMULACRA CORNER



### Cloud dog

This cloud dog was posted on Facebook by the Psychogeographical Commission on 21 Sept 2017.

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.*

## Severed head with fruit

The Krasnodar cannibal couple’s photograph of a severed head on a plate [FT360:24] echoes a publicity poster for the notorious 1973 Amicus horror compendium *Tales That Witness Madness*, in which a character inadvertently eats her daughter. This may not have been a deliberate allusion on the Russians’ part, as the film was, in the words of critic Leslie Halliwell, “in such bad taste that it had very little circulation”.

**Richard George**  
St Albans, Hertfordshire

## Six toes

I very much enjoyed reading the feature on the Patterson / Gimlin bigfoot film [FT360:32-39]. Regarding the photograph of Bob Gimlin and Roger Patterson examining plaster casts of bigfoot prints, did anyone else notice (p.32) that Bob Gimlin appears to

have six toes on his right foot?

**Carol Scott**  
South Shields, Tyne and Wear

## Eyeball Cards

Back in the mid and late Eighties, I was an unemployed youth in a seaside backwater. Being a recent migrant into the area – I’d been at boarding school and my parents had retired to the town – I was nervous and yet eager to try to socialise.

Enter the old CB radio, inexplicable to the generation growing up with online social media. I joined the local CB club, spent hours (months collectively) on air, chatted, socialised, debated, fell in and out of friendships. I can definitively link my presence on CB radio airwaves with meeting my first wife... but I don’t hold a grudge.

This all came back to me when I saw Etienne Gilfillan’s review of *Eyeball Cards* by William Hagan and David Titlow [FT360:64]. As I said to myself

when I turned the page – “Wow! A real blast from the past!”

Money was tight, time was on my hands and I was immersed in the culture. I set about creating and making eyeball cards. It’s hard to explain to a generation that can easily create such things on a large scale, even with a basic word processor, but I had to hand-draw each design, lay it out actual size and pay for a local print shop to print and guillotine the cards.

I was a creator of the very eyeball cards featured in this book, including the “Shy Fox” one reproduced in FT’s review. I was living in Herne Bay at the time; Shy Fox was my first girlfriend. I made Gonzo’s first eyeball cards, and I posit that the copyright for the image (BWD) stands for “Bookworm Designs” – Bookworm was Shy Fox’s mum and I assume she took over eyeball card production when I left the area.

**Alan Cassady-Bishop**  
By email

# LETTERS

## Anything goes

Every French schoolboy knows (or should know) that the Abbey of Thelema ('will' in Greek) is built for Brother Jean des Entommeures by Gargantua in Rabelais's eponymous book (1534). The only 'rule' of this abbey is "Fay ce que voudras" (Do what thou wilt), like Cefalu's one. Rabelais's formula is itself an abbreviation of St Augustine's: "Love and do what thou wilt". Surprisingly, this obvious filiation between Augustine, Rabelais and Crowley is seldom mentioned, when the latter is concerned. Why?

**Francis Gandon**  
Paris

## Another witch bottle tale

Not all witch bottles were used to attack witches or prevent witchcraft. At Norwich, during World War I, a woman fell pregnant while her husband was fighting in France. When he returned he was angry, because the baby was not his, and the couple separated. But the woman's mother was a witch and she got the couple reunited by putting some of her daughter's nail-clippings, hair and urine in a sealed bottle that was placed on the fire, where it soon burst. A few days later, the man came to see his wife and they shortly got back together. This story is in *The Folklore of East Anglia* by Enid Porter.

**Shaun Cooper**  
Clevedon, North Somerset

## Secret bunker

I was surprised to learn about the alleged underground facility in Norway "designed to accommodate two million people in the event of a cataclysmic event" [FT356:73]. Norway has a small, widely dispersed population, and the logistics involved in herding two million of us together in a single location (in 1967 as well as today) would seem daunting. Apart from the practical difficulties, it would hardly be a smart move to collect all those people in one place anyway – except if the 'cataclysmic event' turned out to be famine, but then there wouldn't be much point in accommodating them underground. I don't know anything about this of course, and it may conceivably have been a top-secret project known to a select few; but in that case they would have had even more trouble gathering those two million people on short notice, wouldn't they?

Like other countries during the Cold War, Norway did in fact construct a large number of bomb shelters, nuclear bunkers and military command centres. Some of these installations were secret, some not. None of them would be large enough to accommodate more than a few hundred people (a few thousand at the very most).

I haven't seen Nick Redfern's book, so it would be interesting to know if the letter from "an unnamed Norwegian politician" was shown in facsimile or merely alluded to. In any case, I think the writer must have been fantasising, or misinterpreting information about existing installations.

Even assuming that the facility actually existed... why would Betty Andreasson's abductors take her to a Norwegian bomb shelter, of all places? I'm told these aliens have any number of secret underground cities of their own.

**Nils Erik Grande**  
Oslo, Norway

## Not trying

Regarding the recent clown craze, I wonder if researchers distinguish between those who wear clown masks, and those who actually make themselves up properly with real make-up, and between normal-looking phantom clowns and those who are clearly trying to look like monsters. It seems to me that people who just put on a scary mask and run around the streets are not really trying, and are something quite different from the 'genuine' phantom clown.

**Alan Nash**  
Greenhithe, Kent

## Famous shades

As a ghost hunter, I have visited many interesting graves, including those of Elizabeth Short (aka The Black Dahlia), Oakland Hell's Angels, John Sutter, Marie LaVeau (Louisiana Creole Voodoo queen), Alexander Hamilton Willard (member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition), as well as the Peoples' Temple mass grave in Guyana and Lenin's tomb in Moscow. Three that I find particularly interesting, since their ghosts seem to linger, are Billy the Kid's grave in New Mexico, Jim Morrison's in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris and Napoleon Bonaparte's at Les Invalides in Paris.

What I find fascinating about Billy the Kid (real name Henry McCarty) is that many of his exploits, such as killing 21 men, may have been fabricated by dime novel writers. McCarty's cool nickname made him an instant legend. When he was killed by Pat Garrett, he was probably not ready to go into the white light, which is why people still see him wandering around the old jail in Lincoln and other parts of New Mexico where he either lived or worked. Michael Amos claims that at a ranch in New Mexico he was approached by Billy the Kid's ghost, which told him to be careful of a certain horse that had a nasty kick. The ghost's facial features resembled that of the famous Billy the Kid photo. The figure was transparent and faded away

before his eyes.

Here is an unusual story about Billy the Kid called "Joaquin Murrieta Meets Billy the Kid": <http://www.labyrinthina.com/the-bermuda-triangle-fog.html>

And Melissa Bryan says she is the reincarnation of Billy the Kid's wife:

<<http://beforeitsnews.com/paranormal/2012/04/melissa-bryan-billy-the-kids-wife-2017648.html>>

Karen Jean Walker says that she was sitting in her apartment when Jim Morrison appeared next to her, looked her straight in the eye and (before vanishing) gave her advice on how to live a better life. Many people claim to have seen Morrison's ghost. Diane Fugate says that she was at a party with friends where they discussed how Morrison might have been a serial killer, because at every one of his concerts, a girl either went missing or died, and that some people suspected him of killing groupies. Diane was walking home after the party when Morrison's shade appeared around a corner, gave her a stern look and yelled, "Not true!" Diane fainted and fortunately someone from the party found her lying unconscious in the street. She says she will never badmouth Morrison again.

Several people have claimed to have seen Napoleon's ghost wandering around Paris. Boney's ghost, on horseback, told Jenkins Zarate that he was not pleased with the progress of France. The Museum of The Black Watch has transcribed a letter describing a British soldier's encounter with Napoleon's ghost during the removal of the emperor's remains from St Helena to Paris in 1840. Albert Dieudonné, who played Napoleon in Abel Gance's 1927 film of that name, talked about spooking a night watchman at the Château de Fontainebleau who claimed to be visited by Napoleon's ghost.

The following story first appeared in a British newspaper in January 1832:

**"The Ghost of Napoleon"**  
*At the Mansion House on Saturday, M. Pierre de Blois, a French gentleman who resides in chambers in*





*Leadenhall Street, was summoned before the Lord Mayor for beating Rafael Spaglietti, an image seller, and breaking a very fine bust of Napoleon Buonaparte.*

*"It appeared that the Italian went upstairs to the defendant's room door; at the top of which there was a glass; he raised up the head of the image, which was made of pale clay, to the glass and said softly, 'buy my ghost of Napoleon.' M. de Blois, who had known the Emperor, thought he saw his ghost, and exclaiming 'Oh, Christ, save us!' fell on the floor in a fit. The Italian, seeing no chance of a sale that day, went away and returned the next. M. de Blois, in the meantime, had recovered from his fit, and hearing how his terror had been excited, felt so indignant that the moment he saw Spaglietti at his door the next day, he flew at him and tumbled him and the Emperor downstairs together.*

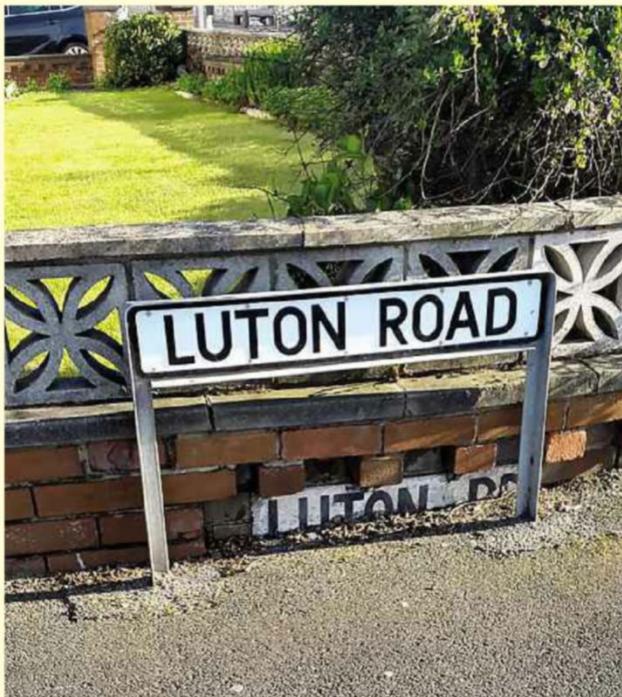
*"It happened that a confectioner's man was that moment coming upstairs with a giblet pie to a Mr. Wilson, who resided in the chambers, and the Emperor and the Italian, in their descent, alighted on his tray, which broke their fall and saved the Italian's head, but could not save Napoleon's, which was totally destroyed – the giblet pie also suffered so much from the collision that Mr. Wilson refused to have anything to do with it. After a good deal of explanation by the parties, and a good deal of laughter amongst the auditors, M. de Blois agreed to pay for the pie, and Mr. Wilson generously paid for the loss of the Emperor."*

**Paul Dale Roberts**

*By email*

## Ufology and capitalism

I enjoyed reading Peter Brookesmith's opinion of my work on how ufology threatens capitalism [FT354:26, 355:28]. However, his understanding of modern and post-modern philosophy and theory is somewhat lacking. Perhaps he should begin by exploring the work of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci who thoroughly explored how 'hegemonic' power systems, such as late capitalism, affect Western democracy and its



## Fat Earth

In periodicals such as *Fortean Times* and the BBC's *Focus* magazine, people have often asked: "Is the Earth getting fatter?" This is because by some estimates the planet is hit by 100-300 metric tons of cosmic dust / meteors etc every day. If true, then obviously over billions of years this must have made the Earth fatter and will continue to do so.

While there are also plausible reasons why this can't be entirely true, I can now settle the debate with evidence that the world is getting fatter by 2.5ft (76cm) every 50 years. As you can see, the earlier road sign has been mostly buried by 2ft-3ft (60-90cm) of space debris. Of course I could be wrong.

**Andy Kelly**

*Lancashire*

'ideals'. Gramsci postulated that civil society ruled the individual via a "manufactured consent" which normalised, using media and other cultural media, the unequal and undemocratic machinations of late capitalism.

To suggest that UFO discourse is a cacophony of noise, "midges", as Brookesmith suggests, is to oversimplify the meaning of discourse itself. Debate is loud, especially concerning a topic no one can truly explain, and for which no answer exists.

Furthermore, he falls into the established, albeit tired, dogmatic trappings of trying to fit ufology into a traditional academic or social framework.

His complaint that ufology has "achieved precisely nothing" due to "delusion and incompetence" reeks of elitism. Perhaps UFO discourse is chaotic because the phenomenon itself, whatever it may be, is chaotic. Yes, ufology has its fools and charlatans, but so does every other field of study.

Where UFO discourse differs is in its ability to separate its own ideologies from the established ideological tenets of late capital. It is not that ufology attempts to offer up an alternate social system to replace modern capital, it is that ufology challenges the ideologies of capitalism itself. It continuously throws ideas around, some rational and some wildly

insane, which oppose current power systems. Capitalism is not threatened because ufology will replace it with something better, but because an entire community (deluded and incompetent according to Brookesmith) exists that ideologically challenges its current hegemonic dominance.

Capitalism is, for better or worse, here to stay. The old men in the boardroom Brookesmith refers to are safe and sound. While ufology will not slay capitalism, it may adjust it slightly in the minds of people, and that is a problem for the status quo. Novel ideas generate anxiety and shift power, and there is one thing old men fear above all else: change, both in social systems and ufology itself.

**Michael Banias**

*writer and curator, Terra Obscura*

Peter Brookesmith replies:

*I am glad that Mr Banias enjoyed my article. However... perhaps Gramsci is correct in his analysis of how capitalism (we don't know if it's late, yet) has affected democracy as we understand it. What does Mr Banias want me to do about it? Otherwise, I have read enough post-modern tosh masquerading as philosophy to last a lifetime, thank you. Given post-modernists' tendencies either to state the obvious in scarcely penetrable jargon or to indulge in gibberish to disguise their own airless vacancies, I politely decline to explore the field further.*

*Mr Banias says that ufology threatens capitalism but will not slay it. I should say that ufology no more threatens capitalism than does the spider in my bath; meanwhile, capitalists I suspect take no more notice of ufology than they do of every sparrow that falls, except where it may help turn a bob or two. In that respect publishing, television and the movies long ago absorbed ufology thanks to its marketability. Cable TV, anyone?*

*Reek as it may in some nostrils, élitism is intrinsic to the way the world actually works. Isn't the po-mo cabal itself an élite? Using the term as a pejorative is about as illuminating as calling the west wind sexist, or noting that capitalists seek to make profits.*

# LETTERS



## Wroth Silver Ceremony

Every St Martin's Day (11 November, or the preceding Saturday, if it falls on a Sunday), there is the Wroth Silver Ceremony (<http://www.wrothsilver.org.uk/>) at sunrise on Knightlow Hill in Stretton-on-Dunsmore in Warwickshire. It is arguably the oldest continuing ceremony in Britain, thought to date back to Saxon, or even to ancient British times. There were once similar ceremonies carried out in other parts of Britain, but only this one has survived. The earliest known written reference to it was in 1170, when it was mentioned as "ongoing". The Feast Day of St Martin of Tours – known as old Hallowe'en since the calendar change of 1752 – was when autumn wheat seeding was completed, and the annual slaughter of fattened cattle produced "Martinmas beef". It is associated with end-of-year celebrations. One legend holds that St Martin was martyred with a mill wheel, so it became bad luck to turn a wheel of any kind on that day, which is a bit unfortunate, because most of us got there by car! It became a time when tenancies were renewed, rents paid and labourers engaged.

A couple of weeks beforehand, the *Rugby Advertiser* announces that the ceremony is going to take place. Although attendance at the ceremony is free, the breakfast afterwards requires buying tickets from the hostelry hosting it. This used to be the Dun Cow pub, which dates back to the 18th century, but in recent years it has been held at various nearby venues, as the Dun Cow

is now derelict following a fire. This year it was in the Queen's Head in nearby Bretford. A lot of us met there at 6am for refreshments, including the traditional hot milk and rum. Then it was off to the ceremony, which starts at 6.45am (sunrise, not that this was very evident this year, what with the rain). We all parked outside what had been the Dun Cow and then walked the few hundred yards along the A45 London Road to the field where the stone is. His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch has stewardship of the ceremony. Formerly it was the Crown, but Charles I transferred it to one of the Duke's ancestors. This was legally contested in the reign of Charles II, but the court ruled in favour of the Duke's ancestor.

The stone had been cleaned out and covered by a blue plastic sheet. When the ceremony was due to start, the sheet was removed, the Duke's steward faced east and read out various parish names which make up Knightlow Hundred (a hundred was a local government district in past times) and how much money they owed. A representative from that parish then threw the amount owed into the Wroth Stone, saying, "Wroth Silver" as they did it. In former centuries, the representative had to go three times around the mound before doing it, but that practice stopped about two centuries ago.

Failure to pay meant either a fine of either 20 shillings for every penny not paid, or forfeiting a white bull, with red nose and ears of the same colour, bulls of that description being descendants of the indigenous cattle of ancient Britain. Another Warwickshire

legend is that of the dun cow (there are a few pubs named after her), which may have been based on one of these cattle. They were quite ferocious compared with present-day domestic cattle. My parish owed a halfpenny, so I and some other people chucked in more than enough. I didn't notice any parish failing to pay; if there was no one from that parish, someone else threw in. The Wroth Stone itself is the remains of an old wayside cross destroyed a few centuries ago. The grade two listed base is still there and that is where the money is deposited. The stone is on top of a tumulus, which is probably the grave of an important person most likely from Saxon times, although some say either an ancient British chieftain or a Roman general. In the 18th century there were four fir trees at each corner, said to represent four knights who were slain nearby.

Once dawn had broken, it was back to the Queen's Head in Bretford for breakfast and speeches. We all got served our cooked breakfast, along with traditional hot milk and rum to toast the speeches. There was a toast to His Grace and the speeches were by the Lady Mayor of Rugby, His Grace's steward and various other notables, some of whom have been attending for decades. The tenant of the field where the stone is located received his shilling for looking after the stone. Someone gave a talk about the ceremony itself and a local poet read a poem that he had written about it. There was also the opportunity to purchase a book, *Wroth Silver Today* by William Waddilove and

David Eadon (ISBN: 0950918512). Each of us was also given a clay churchwarden pipe. I smoked mine with some tobacco provided – the first time that I had smoked tobacco for about five years. After the ceremony we all had a group photograph outside, which appeared in the following week's *Rugby Advertiser* (<http://www.rugbyadvertiser.co.uk/news/record-turn-out-for-ancient-ceremony-in-ryton-1-8244180>).

What was the ceremony's purpose? There are various ideas. Some say this it might be feudal; for instance, Ward Money, paid in lieu of military service. People have tried to find the answer by looking at the etymology of the words; one problem is that spelling was rather casual in years gone by, although the consensus does seem to be that the etymology is Anglo Saxon. The prevailing idea is that in Saxon times the area was largely covered in the Forest of Arden (now largely gone, but existing and being replanted in places). Apart from the occasional surviving Roman road – like the Fosse Way nearby – moving livestock around was pretty difficult, so the Wroth Silver was paid as a sort of protection and right of way tax.

Anyone can attend: you don't have to be a resident of the hundred. I will probably attend again. This year there was over 100 attendees. The lowest number in living memory was six, during World War II, which was understandable – but the fact that they still did it proves that you cannot keep a good, ancient ceremony down!

**Gary Stocker**  
By email

# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of [www.foanteantimes.com](http://www.foanteantimes.com)

## Columbo returns

I was interested to read in *Ghostwatch* about the paranormal activity at Wentworth Woodhouse mansion in South Yorkshire [FT355:19]. A year or so ago, my wife bought me a "ghost hunting" expedition at the mansion and we, along with a number of what appeared to me to be somewhat suggestible and excitable other people, turned up to investigate the allegedly spooky goings-on there. Whilst many other people reported seeing mysterious shadows and hearing strange noises (Fellow ghost hunter: "OMG!!! Did you see that figure walk past the window just now?" My wife and I: "No"), we did witness, as Mr Murdie referenced in his article, the phenomenon of a chair "unexpectedly appearing", to wit the lights being switched off in a room leaving it pitch black and then being switched back on a minute later to reveal that a chair had materialised behind someone.

However, the most perplexing manifestation occurred during a Ouija board session in the main entrance hall. After a bit of table-tipping, the entity in contact with us started to spell out somewhat random letter sequences until eventually a coherent word started to form: F... A... L... K... At this point, I blurted out "Are you Columbo"? The glass immediately zoomed across the table to the YES card. No one else round the table seemed to think it was remarkable that the shade of Hollywood actor Peter Falk had chosen to make contact with this earthly realm in a mansion in South Yorkshire. I like to think, however, that even from beyond the grave, Mr Falk in his guise as LAPD detective Columbo had just one more thing he wanted to share with us.

**Chris Owen**

*Doncaster, South Yorkshire*

## Clerical saviour

I live on the southern borders of



Wiltshire and before the M4 was built I frequently used to visit my old home in Pembrokeshire on a 100cc motorbike, travelling north until I hit the A40. The journey took many hours. Returning once in the autumn in about 1964, I had reached the bleak, thinly populated plateau above Gloucester when the bike broke down. No traffic and no habitation. I just pushed it along in the failing light, cursing my luck.

Presently, a large lorry drew up, driven by a parson. He asked me what was wrong and said he often got a feeling when something was wrong and drove out to investigate. We loaded the bike onto the lorry, went to his vicarage to have some soup and then he drove me all the way home. His wife seemed resigned. I have always been lucky, but this was pushing the edge of reality too far.

**Patrick F James**  
*Salisbury, Wiltshire*

## Ghost motorbike

One clear summer's evening in the late 1990s, I was driving with my partner on the M62 from Manchester Airport to Hull. It was about 10.30pm and still

slightly light when we left the airport. By the time we got past Junction 34, the traffic was very light and I was driving in the inside lane. At one point, I could see the single headlight of what I presumed to be a motorbike in the middle lane behind me. It was travelling faster than me and getting closer and I assumed it was going to overtake. The next time I looked in the rear-view mirror it was no longer there. I could see the headlights of several vehicles about a quarter of a mile behind me, but no sign of the bike or a single headlight. I thought it was unusual for a motorbike rider to decide to slow down and drop back, but dismissed my slight unease.

I continued in the inside lane for another five to 10 minutes until I saw a slower-moving van ahead and needed to pull out to overtake. When I looked in the rear-view mirror before signalling, the single light of 'that bike' was there again in the middle lane. I muttered something along the lines of "Hurry up and get past, I want to pull out", which prompted my partner to look in the passenger side mirror to see what I was talking about. Just before the bike caught me

up, the light disappeared again and all I could see in the orange flashing light from my indicator was an empty road... My partner confirmed that he too had seen the light just disappear. We were both quite spooked and discussed possible explanations, but came to no conclusion. We agreed that even if the bike's lights had cut out suddenly due to an electrical fault and the driver had quickly pulled over onto the hard shoulder we would still have seen the physical shape of the bike reflected in my indicator or rear lights. There was just nothing there.

**Gina Culling**  
*By email*

## Copycat

We had an experience very similar to that of Gavin of Pembrokeshire [FT355:76]. A few years ago my wife Mandy opened the front door at the behest of our beautiful Maine Coon, Mumby-cat, who wanted out. She carefully ensured his magnificent brush of a tail was well clear before closing the door behind him. She then turned round and walked the dozen or so steps back into the kitchen... only to find Mumby sitting by his food dish, and looking up at her, calm as you like! Mandy's care in watching him leave precludes any possibility of his having suddenly doubled back unseen. As in Gavin's account, there was no direct access from the front of the house to the back door with its cat flap. Mumbycat would have had to nip out to the road, down the length of the neighbour's front and back gardens, jumped up on to, and then down from, the high fence at the bottom (the dividing hedge and fence between the gardens being virtually cat-proof), then back down our back garden, some 50ft (15m), and in through the flap with a crash. No chance.

Bilocation? One thing's for sure: "Cats is fairy" all right!  
**Roger Wyld**  
*Dorchester, Dorset*

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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an

intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, FT is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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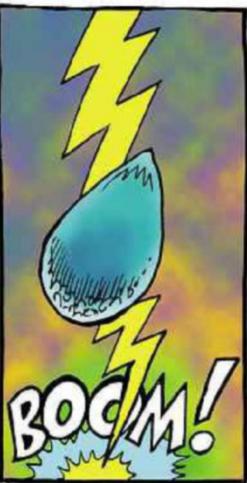
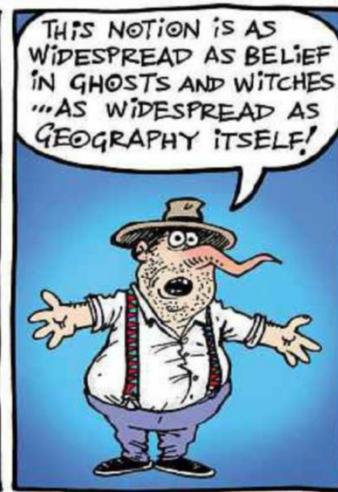
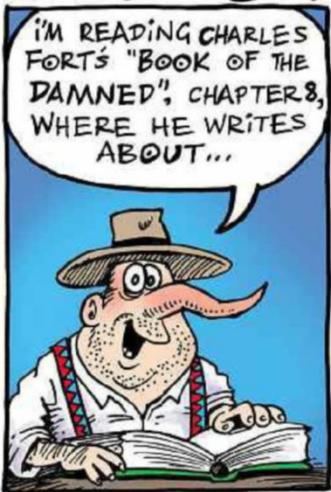
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THUNDERSTONES HUNT EMERSON

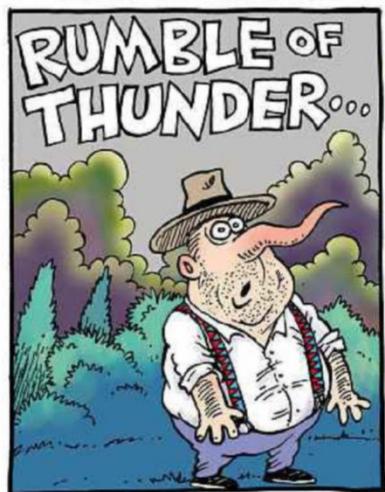
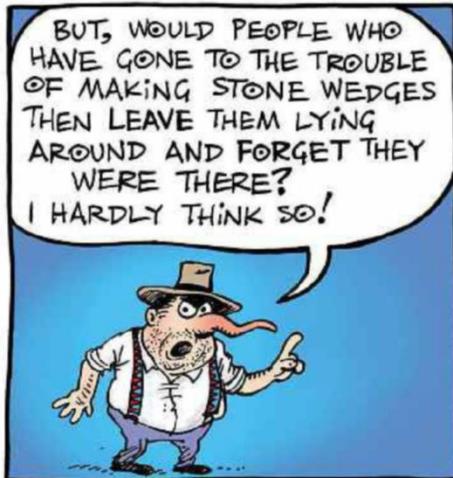
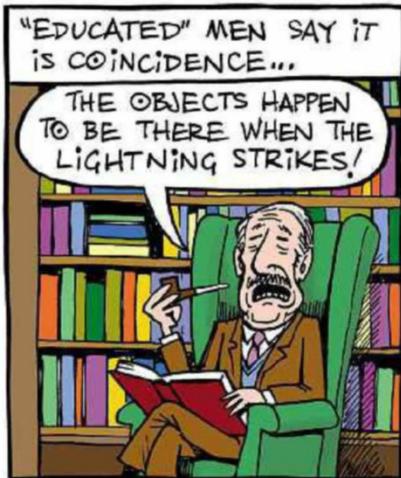
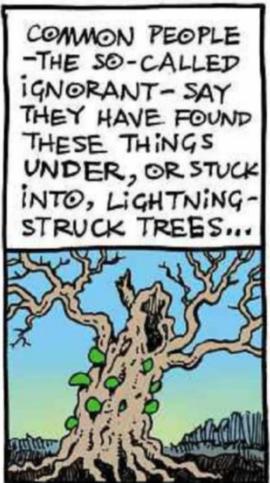


SPAIN AND PORTUGAL CALL THEM "LIGHTNING STONES"...

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IN SOUTH AMERICA: "STONE HATCHETS"...

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# FORTEAN TIMES 363

ON SALE 1 FEB 2018

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A couple from Meolo, near Venice, and their 11-year-old son Lorenzo died on 12 September when they fell into a 10ft (3m) hole that suddenly opened up in a highly active volcanic area near Naples. Lorenzo wandered beyond the safety barriers and was swallowed up by the pit, plunging into boiling hot mud at the Solfatara Crater in Pozzuoli, part of a huge volcanic area known as the Campi Flegrei or Phlegraean Fields. His father Massimiliano Carrer, 45, rushed to his rescue but also fell into the sinkhole, followed by his mother, Tiziana Zampella, 42. All three died after being overcome by mud and sulphurous gases. Lorenzo's brother, aged seven, survived. Solfatara is a dormant volcano that last erupted in 1198. Ancient Romans believed the area held the entrance to the Underworld. *BBC News, 12 Sept; D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 13 Sept 2017.*

A man died on 16 September in a haunted house attraction called "Buried Alive" at Hong Kong's largest amusement park. The 21-year-old, surnamed Cheung, was hit by a coffin and found unconscious after becoming disoriented. He was taken to hospital where he was pronounced dead. The tragedy happened at an event for invited guests ahead of Hallowe'en festivities at Ocean Park. The attraction's website says visitors enter a coffin and "experience being buried alive alone, before fighting their way out of their dark and eerie grave." The coffin descends into a dimly lit "rocky maze filled with dreadful ghouls." Visitors then navigate their way out past numerous scares. A government statement said Cheung was "believed to have entered into an area for mechanical operations that was not open to visitors. He was hit by a mechanical part." *D.Telegraph, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, Sun, 18 Sept; Times, 20 Sept 2017.*

Devoted Christian Lidia Drăgescu, a 23-year-old biomedical student, died on 11 October after climbing a shoulder-high barrier and launching herself backwards from the Whispering Gallery in St Paul's Cathedral in London, falling 100ft (30m) to the marble floor below while holding two suicide notes in her native Romanian. One note was to her mother; the other apologised to churchgoers who watched her fall from her "favourite place". The talented figure skater and aspiring brain surgeon, who lived with her family in Romford, visited the cathedral at least once a week and often climbed the 257 steps to

the Whispering Gallery. Her mother said she had been researching the San Francisco Zodiac killer and had been reading a lot of Dan Brown novels because she was "fascinated by criminal minds". She said Lidia picked the cathedral to die in "because she needed to fly into God's arms". Vlad, Lidia's twin, vowed never to celebrate his birthday again. *Sun, 12+17+19 Oct; D.Telegraph, 17 Oct 2017.*

A woman from New Zealand died after being thrown to the ground by a jet engine blast on Maho beach, next to Princess Juliana International Airport on the Caribbean island of Sint Maarten. The 57-year-old woman was standing by a chain-link fence along with several other tourists watching a Trinidad-bound Boeing 737 take off before being knocked to the ground with her head hitting the concrete footpath. She was treated in hospital for serious head injuries, but died a short while later. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 14 July 2017.*

On 19 March, a falling tree at a waterfall beauty spot near the town of Kintampo in Ghana killed at least 18 swimmers, crushed by heavy branches, and injured a further 20. Then in August, 13 people, including two children, died after a tree came crashing down on crowds at a famous religious festival, the Festa da Senhora do Monte (Our Lady of the Mountain), on the Portuguese island of Madeira. Another 49 people were injured after the 200-year-old oak fell on tourists and local worshippers buying candles to take part in a street procession. *Eve. Standard, 20 Mar; D.Telegraph, 21 Mar; Metro, 16 Aug; (Queensland) Courier Mail, 17 Aug 2017.*

Takahiro Shiraishi, 27, was arrested after body parts of eight females and one male, including two severed heads, were found at his small apartment in Zama, Kanagawa prefecture, south of Tokyo. The remains were concealed under cat litter inside coolboxes. The police had been investigating the disappearance of a 23-year-old woman who vanished in Hachioji, western Tokyo, on 21 October when the horrific discoveries were made. Shiraishi had moved into the apartment in late August, and was reported to be a 'scout', recruiting women for the sex industry. The woman from Hachioji had met him online after he responded to a message she posted on a suicide website stating that she wanted to kill herself. *BBC News, 31 Oct; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 1 Nov 2017.*

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